



AGLAVAINÉ
AND
SELYSETTE

BY
MAURICE MAETERLINCK

TRANSLATED BY
ALFRED SUTRO

(ACTING VERSION)

LONDON
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1904

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BY MAURICE MAETERLINCK

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AGLAVAINÉ AND SELYSETTE

AS PERFORMED AT THE
COURT THEATRE, LONDON
NOVEMBER 1904

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At the Ballantyne Press

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MELEANDER.

AGLAVAINÉ.

SELYSETTE.

MELIGRANE (SELYSETTE'S *grandmother*).

LITTLE YSSALINE (SELYSETTE'S *sister*).

AGLAVAINÉ & SELYSETTE

ACT FIRST

A Room in the Castle.

MELIGRANE is asleep on a high-backed chair at the far end of the room. Enter MELEANDER and SÉLYSETTE.

MELEANDER.

I will read you Aglavaine's letter: "Do not go out to meet me. Wait for me in the room wherein you linger, every evening,—and thus I shall not come upon you as a stranger. It is as I leave the boat that has brought me to you that I write these lines. Our crossing was very calm and beautiful, but, when I landed, I found the roads all sodden with rain; and the sun will probably have set ere I behold the towers of the old castle where our good Selysette has offered shelter to her brother's widow. . . .

SELYSETTE.

[Clapping her hands.] Oh! the sun is setting! . . . Look!—she must be near at hand. . . . I will see whether

MELEANDER.

[*Staying her with a gesture, and continuing to read.*] “. . . I have only seen you once, Meleander, and it was in the midst of the confusion and distraction of my wedding—my poor wedding, alas! where we beheld not the guest none ever invite, who yet always usurps the seat of the happiness we look for. Only once have I seen you, and more than three years have passed since then; but I come to you as confidently as though we two had known each other from infancy, and had been rocked to sleep in the same cradle. . . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Turning round.*] Oh! Grandam is still asleep! . . . Ought we to wake her when Aglavaine comes? . . .

MELEANDER.

Yes, it is her wish. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Her eyes are almost hidden beneath her white hair. . . . She is not happy to-night. . . . Oh! I want to kiss her. . .

MELEANDER.

Be careful you do not wake her too soon. . . . [*He continues to read.*] “And, coming to you, I know full well that it is as a brother you will greet me! . . . We said but little to each other, and yet the few words you spoke to me were different from all those I had heard till then. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Do not read so quickly. . . .

MELEANDER.

[*Reading.*] “. . . And besides, I look forward so eagerly to taking Selysette in my arms! . . . She must be good, she must be beautiful, since she loves you and has your love. I feel that I shall love her much more than you ever can, for I know how to give more love; I have been unhappy. . . . And now, I am glad to have suffered; I shall be able to share with you all that sorrow brings us. There are times when I think that the tribute I have paid may well suffice for the three of us; that destiny can have no further claim upon us, and that we may look forward to a marvellous life. We shall seek happiness, and naught beside. We shall so fill ourselves, and all around us, with beauty, that there will no longer be room for sorrow or misfortune; and, would these none the less force their entrance, needs must they too become beautiful before they dare knock at our door.”

[*A door opens. Enter little YSSALINE.*

YSSALINE.

I have the key, little sister, I have the key! . . .

MELEANDER.

What key?

SELYSETTE.

The key of the old tower.

MELEANDER.

I thought it was lost. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I have had another one made.

MELEANDER.

I hope you will lose that one too.

SELYSETTE.

[*Examining the key.*] Oh! how large it is! . . .
It does not look like the one I lost.

YSSALINE.

I was there, little sister, when they tried it. . . .
They opened the door three times, then they shut
it again. . . . It fits much better than the other
key, which was all rusty. . . . But it was hard to
close the last time, because of the wind, which was
pushing from the other side. . . . There is a great
wind to-night. You can hear the sea-gulls all
round the tower; and the doves too. . . . They
have not yet gone to sleep. . . .

SELYSETTE.

They are looking for me; they have not seen
me up there for a long time—two weeks and more.
. . . I will go to-morrow.

YSSALINE.

With me, little sister?

SELYSETTE.

Yes, if you will go to bed at once; your nurse is waiting. . . . [*YSSALINE goes.*] She is beautiful? . . .

MELEANDER.

Who?

SELYSETTE.

Aglavaine.

MELEANDER.

Yes, very beautiful. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Whom is she like?

MELEANDER.

She is like no other woman. . . . Her beauty is different, that is all . . . stranger and more ethereal; it is never the same—one might almost say it was more manifold . . . it is a beauty along which the soul can pass unhindered. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I know I am not beautiful. . . .

MELEANDER.

You will never say that again, once she is here. It is impossible to say anything one does not believe, or that is useless, in her presence. Nothing can live near her that is not true. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Nothing can live near her that is not true. . . .

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SELYSETTE.

Nothing can live near her that is not true. . . .

MELEANDER.

Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Meleander?

MELEANDER.

We have lived together for nearly four years,
have we not? . . .

SELYSETTE.

It will be four years, when the summer ends.

MELEANDER.

Nearly four years that you have been by my side, always beautiful, always tender and loving, and the soft smile on your lips revealed the deep happiness within. . . . Tell me, you have not shed many tears during these four years? At most some few little tears when a pet bird flew away, or your grandmother reproved you, or your favourite flowers died. But no sooner had the bird returned, or your grandmother forgiven you, than you came back into the room laughing merrily and leapt on my knee, kissing me like a little girl home from school. I think we may fairly claim to have been happy; and yet there are times when I wonder whether we have truly lived near enough to each other. . . . I know not whether it was I who lacked the patience to follow you, or you who fled too swiftly; but often, when I tried to speak to you as I spoke just now, you would seem to reply to me from the other end of the world, where reasons unknown to me had impelled you to seek

refuge. . . . I do not know why this is borne home to me so clearly this evening.—Is it because Aglavaine lives more freshly in my memory? Has her letter, the news of her arrival, already freed something in our soul?—You and I would seem to have loved each other as much as it is possible to love. But, when she is here, we shall love each other still more; we shall love each other differently, more deeply—you will see. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Love her if you will. I shall go away. . . .

MELEANDER.

Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE.

I know that I cannot understand. . .

MELEANDER.

You do understand, Selysette, and it is because I know that you understand, though you feign the contrary, that I speak to you of these things. . . . There are depths in your soul that you never reveal to me; nay, you take pleasure in hiding them. . . . Do not cry, Selysette, I am not reproaching you. . .

SELYSETTE.

I was not crying. Wherefore should I cry?

MELEANDER.

And yet I can see that your lips are trembling. . .

SELYSETTE.

My thoughts were far away. . . Is it true that she has been unhappy?

MELEANDER.

Yes, she has been unhappy on account of your brother. . .

SELYSETTE.

Perhaps she deserved to be. . .

MELEANDER.

I doubt whether a woman can ever deserve to be unhappy. . .

SELYSETTE.

What was it my brother did?

MELEANDER.

She begged me not to tell you. . .

SELYSETTE.

You have been writing to each other?

MELEANDER.

Yes; from time to time.

SELYSETTE.

You never told me.

MELEANDER.

When her letters came I have more than once shown them to you, but you did not seem anxious to read them. . .

SELYSETTE.

I don't remember. . .

MELEANDER.

But I remember it well. . .

SELYSETTE.

Where was it that you saw her for the last time?

MELEANDER.

Have I not told you I only saw her once? It was in the garden of your brother's castle. . . . With great trees spreading over us. . .

SELYSETTE.

In the evening?

MELEANDER.

Yes; in the evening.

SELYSETTE.

What did she say?

MELEANDER.

We said but little to each other. But we could see that the lives of both of us tended towards the same goal. . .

SELYSETTE.

Did you kiss each other?

MELEANDER.

When?

SELYSETTE.

On that evening. . .

MELEANDER.

Yes, when I went away. . .

SELYSETTE.

Ah !

MELEANDER.

I think she will stay but a short time with us, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no; I want her to stay. . . . [*There is a noise outside.*] There she is! [*She runs to the window.*] There are torches in the courtyard.

[*A moment's silence. The great door opens and AGLAVINE appears on the threshold. She comes in without saying a word, and stands in front of SELYSETTE, looking fixedly at her.*]

MELEANDER.

Will you not kiss each other ?

AGLAVINE.

Yes. [*She presses a long kiss on SELYSETTE'S lips, then goes to MELEANDER, whom she kisses likewise.*] And you too. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I must wake grandam. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

[*Looking at MELIGRANE.*] How profoundly she sleeps! . . .

MELEANDER.

She sleeps like this for many hours each day. . . . Her arms are paralysed. . . . Go close to her; she wishes to see you to-night. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

[*Taking MELIGRANE'S hand and bending over her.*] Grandmother! . . .

MELIGRANE.

[*Awaking.*] Selysette! . . . [*She opens her eyes.*] Oh! who are you?

AGLAVAINÉ.

Aglavaine. . . .

MELIGRANE.

I was startled. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

May I kiss you, grandmother?

MELIGRANE.

You call me grandmother? I cannot see you very well. . . . Who is that behind you?

SELYSETTE.

[*Coming forward.*] It is I, grandam.

MELIGRANE.

Ah! it is you, Selysette. . . . I could not see you. . . . Bring the lamp a little nearer, my child. . . .

[SELYSETTE brings a lamp, whose light falls on AGLAVINE.

MELIGRANE.

[Looking at AGLAVINE.] Oh! you are beautiful! . . .

AGLAVINE.

May I kiss you now, grandmother?

MELIGRANE.

No; do not kiss me to-night. . . . The pain is worse than usual. Selysette is the only one who can touch me without hurting.

AGLAVINE.

That is what I want to learn, too—to touch without hurting. . . .

MELIGRANE.

Kiss me, Selysette, before I go to sleep again, and take away the lamp. . . . I was in the midst of a strange dream. . . .

SELYSETTE.

[Going back with the lamp.] You must forgive her; she suffers so much. . . .

Meleander only went once; he felt giddy. It is very high—you will see. The ocean stretches before you. It foams all round the tower, except on the castle side. And all the birds of the sea live in the crevices of the walls. They send forth loud cries when they recognise me. There are hundreds of doves, too; people tried to drive them away, but they refuse to leave the tower. They always come back. . . . Are you tired?

AGLAVINE.

Yes, a little, Selysette. I have had a long journey.

SELYSETTE.

Yes, of course. . . . We will go thither to-morrow; and besides, there is a strong wind to-night. . . .

[*A silence.*]

MELEANDER.

It is strange, Aglavaine. . . . I had so much to tell you. . . . But in these first moments everything is still, and I feel as though there were something for which we were waiting.

AGLAVINE.

We are waiting for the silence to speak. . .

MELEANDER.

What does it say to you?

AGLAVINE.

It would not be the real silence, Meleander, were we able to repeat all that it tells us. . . .

We have exchanged a few, almost meaningless, words—words that any one could have spoken—and for all that, do we not feel at rest, do we not know that we have said things to each other that far outvalue our words? We have uttered the little timid words that strangers speak when they meet; and yet, who can tell all that has taken place between the three of us? Who can tell whether all that has to happen may not have been decided beneath one of these words? . . . But this much our silence has foretold to me: that I shall love Selysette like a little sister. . . . It cried that out to me, through all my soul, as I took my first step into the room; and it is the only voice that I have heard clearly. . . . [*Drawing SELYSETTE to her.*] Why is it, Selysette, that one has to love you so dearly, and that the unbidden tears flow forth as one kisses you? . . . [*She presses a long kiss on her lips.*] Come, you too, Meleander. . . . [*She kisses him likewise.*] It was perhaps this kiss for which we were all waiting, and it will be the seal of our silence for the night. . . .

[*They go out.*]

ACT SECOND

SCENE I.—*A leafy grove in the park.*

AGLAVINE *and* MELEANDER.

MELEANDER.

For five or six days only have we been living together under this roof, and already it seems to me that we must have spent our whole lives together; that I must have known you before I knew myself. All that I am appears to result from you; I am more conscious of your soul than of my own, you are nearer to me than all that is myself. . . . Were you not there I should no longer be conscious of myself; it is only in you that I can smile, only in you that I can love. . . .

AGLAVINE.

So it is with me, too, Meleander. . . . Your least gesture reveals me to myself; there is not a smile, not a silence, not a word that comes from you but links me to a newer beauty. . . I feel that I flower in you as you flower in me; and we are ever springing to birth again in each other. . . Our souls speak to each other long before the words leave our lips.

MELEANDER.

The same world is within us, Aglavaine. God must have erred when He fashioned two souls out of our one. Where were you all these years of our life when neither of us knew of the other's existence?

AGLAVINE.

And you, Meleander, where were you, all these years that I have been waiting, in solitude? . . .

MELEANDER.

I was alone, too, and waiting, but hope had left me. . .

AGLAVINE.

I was alone and waiting, but had never ceased to hope. . . Oh, there are times when I feel that it cannot be! . . .

MELEANDER.

I too, Aglavaine, and it frightens me. . . .

AGLAVINE.

Why should we be frightened? . . . We have found each other, what can there be to fear?

MELEANDER.

Is it not at the very moment of happiness that fear should come to us? . . . Is that not the most ominous time of all? for not a kiss is given but an enemy may be awakened . . . and besides there is something else. . . .

AGLAVINE.

What ?

MELEANDER.

Selysette. . .

AGLAVINE.

Well ?

MELEANDER.

Have you thought of Selysette ?

AGLAVINE.

Yes.

MELEANDER.

And does that not trouble you ?

AGLAVINE.

No, Meleander, it shall trouble me no more. . .

MELEANDER.

There may be sorrow in store for her. . .

AGLAVINE.

Can I not love you like a brother, Meleander ?

MELEANDER.

But if her tears fall ? . . .

AGLAVINE.

Let her ascend with us, and her tears will soon cease to fall. . . . Why should she not strive hand-in-hand with us towards the love that disdains the pettiness of love ? She is more beautiful than you believe, Meleander. We shall hold out our hands to her ; she will soon rejoin us, and then she will

weep no more. . . . And she will bless us for the tears she has shed, for some tears are sweeter than kisses. . .

MELEANDER.

Do you believe I can love you like a sister, Aglavaine?

AGLAVAINE.

Ah ! . . .

MELEANDER.

Aglavaine, do you believe you can love me like a brother ?

AGLAVAINE.

Now that you have asked me, I no longer seem to know, Meleander. . . .

MELEANDER.

I cannot believe it. We shall struggle day and night ; we shall struggle for a long, long time ; and all that is finest in us, all that might have turned into exquisite love, into beauty and deepest truth, will be exhausted in this futile effort. . . . And the more we struggle, the more shall we be conscious of a desire creeping up between our two souls like a heavy curtain. . . . And all that is best in us will perish, because of this desire. . . . It may seem to mean so little . . . and yet . . . is it not by the kiss we give that all things are transformed—stars and flowers, night and morning, thoughts and tears ? . . . Is the immensity of the night as clear to the sister's eyes as it is to the woman who loves ? Let us not bar the door to the most

MELÉANDER.

She has overheard us. . . She is flying to the castle. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

[*Pointing to SELYSETTE, who is already far away.*] Go after her! . . . Go! . . .

[*He rushes after SELYSETTE.* AGLAVAINÉ leans against a tree and weeps silently.

I know it, Aglavainé, but what can we do? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

It was destiny brought us together, Meléander. We recognised each other as perhaps two souls have never recognised each other before. We love; and henceforth nothing in the world can alter my love for you or yours for me. . .

MELÉANDER.

That I believe, too, Aglavainé.—I see nothing in the world. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

But if I brought sorrow to one who is innocent, would I be the same to you? . . .

MELÉANDER.

If she be sorrowful, it will only be because she has not understood. . .

AGLAVINE.

Tears are not less bitter because they should not fall. . .

MELEANDER.

There would be nothing left us but to fly from each other, Aglavaine; yet that is impossible . . . So beautiful a thing was not born only to die; and we have duties towards ourselves. . . .

AGLAVINE.

I believe that too; and I believe that there is something better to be done than to fly from each other. . . In the meanwhile, if suffering there must be, let that suffering be ours. . . .

MELEANDER.

[*Taking her in his arms.*] You are beautiful, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVINE.

[*Throwing her arms around him.*] I love you, Meleander. . .

[*They kiss each other. A cry of pain is heard, through the foliage, and SELYSETTE is seen, all dishevelled, flying towards the castle.*]

MELEANDER.

Selysette! . . .

AGLAVINE.

Yes.

beautiful of all truths, Aglavaine. . . . Let not all that is radiant in our two souls go break itself against one petty falsehood. . . You are not my sister, Aglavaine, and I cannot love you like a sister. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

It is true that you are not my brother, Meleander; and it is here, doubtless, that suffering awaits us. . .

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MELEANDER.

Selysette! . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Yes.

MELEANDER.

She has overheard us. . . She is flying to the castle. . . .

AGLAVINE.

[*Pointing to SELYSETTE, who is already far away.*] Go after her! . . . Go! . . .

[*He rushes after SELYSETTE.* AGLAVINE leans against a tree and weeps silently.

SCENE II.—*In the depths of the park.* AGLAVINE is asleep on a bench, with a veil thrown round her head.

Enter SELYSETTE.

SELYSETTE.

"Selysette, little Selysette, we must not let her cry." . . . He pities me, because he no longer loves me. . . Neither do I love him any more. . . They fancy that I shall keep very quiet, and that all they have to do is to kiss me with their eyes turned away. . . "Selysette, little Selysette." . . They say that very tenderly; oh, much more tenderly than they used to. . . . When he kisses me now he dare not look at me, or, if he does, he seems to be begging forgiveness. . . And while they are embracing each other I must crouch away and hide, as though I had stolen something. . . They have gone out again to-night, and I have lost sight of them. . . "Little Selysette" is not in the secret . . . we always smile when

we speak to her . . . we kiss her on the forehead . . . and bring her flowers and fruit . . . The stranger takes "little Selysette" under her wing . . . and we cry when we kiss her, and say, "Poor little thing . . . there is nothing to be done. . . . She will not go away . . . but at least she shall not see anything" . . . and when her head is turned we take each other by the hand . . . yes, yes, till the time comes . . . only wait, wait. . . . "Little Selysette" will have her day too. . . . She does not yet quite know what she ought to do, but wait a little . . . we shall see. . . . [*Perceiving AGLAVINE on the bench.*] There they are! . . . Asleep in each other's arms! . . . Oh! this! this! . . . I must . . . Yssaline! Grandam! . . . They must see . . . they must see this! . . . There is no one coming! . . . I am alone, always. . . . I will . . . [*Going closer.*] She is alone, too . . . was it a ray of the moon or her white veil? Perhaps . . . She is asleep. What shall I do? . . . Oh, she doesn't know! . . . She is on the brink of the well; a sudden turn and she would fall in. . . . It has been raining . . . she threw her veil over her head, but her bosom is bare . . . she is wet through . . . how cold she must be . . . this country is strange to her. . . . Oh, how she trembles in her sleep! . . . I will put my cloak around her . . . [*She covers AGLAVINE up and lifts the veil that hides her face.*] How deep is this sleep of hers! . . . She looks as though she had been crying . . . she does not seem happy . . . she seems no happier than I

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Enter SELYSETTE.

SELYSETTE.

"Selysette, little Selysette, we must not let her cry." . . . He pities me, because he no longer loves me. . . Neither do I love him any more. . . They fancy that I shall keep very quiet, and that all they have to do is to kiss me with their eyes turned away. . . "Selysette, little Selysette." . . They say that very tenderly; oh, much more tenderly than they used to. . . . When he kisses me now he dare not look at me, or, if he does, he seems to be begging forgiveness. . . And while they are embracing each other I must crouch away and hide, as though I had stolen something. . . They have gone out again to-night, and I have lost sight of them. . . "Little Selysette" is not in the secret . . . we always smile when

we speak to her . . . we kiss her on the forehead . . . and bring her flowers and fruit . . . The stranger takes "little Selysette" under her wing . . . and we cry when we kiss her, and say, "Poor little thing . . . there is nothing to be done. . . . She will not go away . . . but at least she shall not see anything" . . . and when her head is turned we take each other by the hand . . . yes, yes, till the time comes . . . only wait, wait. . . . "Little Selysette" will have her day too. . . . She does not yet quite know what she ought to do, but wait a little . . . we shall see. . . . [*Perceiving AGLAVINE on the bench.*] There they are! . . . Asleep in each other's arms! . . . Oh! this! this! . . . I must . . . Yssaline! Grandam! . . . They must see . . . they must see this! . . . There is no one coming! . . . I am alone, always. . . . I will . . . [*Going closer.*] She is alone, too . . . was it a ray of the moon or her white veil? Perhaps . . . She is asleep. What shall I do? . . . Oh, she doesn't know! . . . She is on the brink of the well; a sudden turn and she would fall in. . . . It has been raining . . . she threw her veil over her head, but her bosom is bare . . . she is wet through . . . how cold she must be . . . this country is strange to her. . . . Oh, how she trembles in her sleep! . . . I will put my cloak around her . . . [*She covers AGLAVINE up and lifts the veil that hides her face.*] How deep is this sleep of hers! . . . She looks as though she had been crying . . . she does not seem happy . . . she seems no happier than I

. . . How pale she is; she is crying too, I see. . . .
She is beautiful. . . . She is even more beautiful
when she is so pale . . . she seems to blend with
the light of the moon . . . I must wake her gently
. . . she might be frightened and fall into the
well . . . [*Bending tenderly over her.*] Aglavaine
. . . Aglavaine . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

[*Waking*]. Ah! . . . how light it is. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Be careful . . . you are on the edge. . . . Don't
turn round, you would be giddy. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Where am I?

SELYSETTE.

By the side of the castle well. Did you not
know? . . . You should not come here alone.
One has to be very careful; this spot is dan-
gerous. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I did not know . . . it was so dark. . . . I
saw the boxwood hedge, and a bench. . . . I was
weary, and sad. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Are you cold? Draw the cloak around you. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Whose cloak is this? Yours, Selysette? You
put it over me while I was sleeping? You
must be cold too. . . . Come hither, let me wrap

it round you too. . . . You are trembling more than I. . . . [*Turning round.*] Oh! . . . Now that the moon has risen I can see the glimmer of the water between the walls. . . . If I had moved . . . and it is you. . . . [*She throws a long look at SELYSETTE and puts her arms around her.*] Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Let us not stay here. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

We should never resist moments such as these, Selysette. . . . They do not come a second time. . . . I have seen your soul, Selysette, for just now you loved me, though it was against your will. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Let us go, Aglavainé . . . there is fever about this place. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I beseech you, Selysette, do not try to escape me at the very moment when all that is deepest in you is striving towards me. . . . Do you think we shall ever be nearer to each other? . . . Shall we allow little childish words, little words that are as thorns, to steal between these poor hearts of ours? . . . Come close to me, Selysette, come close to me in the night and let my arms enfold you; and it matters not though you find no words. . . . Something is speaking within you, and I hear it as you hear it. . . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Bursting into tears.*] Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVINE.

Aglavaine's tears are falling too, Selysette. . . . She is weeping because she too is ignorant of the thing that should be done, the thing that should be said. . . . We are alone here, my poor Selysette; we two are all alone here in the darkness, clinging close to each other . . . and the happiness or unhappiness that must befall is being decided within us, at this very moment, perhaps. . . . But what is to be none can tell. And I have only my tears with which to question the future. I held myself the wiser of the two, but now that the moment has come that calls for wisdom I feel that my need of you is greater than your need of me. And therefore do my tears flow, Selysette, and therefore do I press my lips upon yours, so that we two may be as near as we possibly can to that which is being decided in the depths of us. I hurt you sorely this morning. . . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no; you did not hurt me. . . .

AGLAVINE.

I hurt you sorely this morning, and my one desire is never to hurt you again. But how can we help giving pain to those we love most? . . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Sobbing.*] Aglavainé!

AGLAVAINÉ.

What is it, Selysette? You are trembling.

SELYSETTE.

It was the first time I had seen you asleep. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

You will often see me asleep, Selysette.

SELYSETTE.

And no one had ever told me anything. . . .
No one, no one!

AGLAVAINÉ.

Yes, yes, my poor Selysette, they will doubtless have told you the things they tell to all. But you had not yet learned to listen. . . .

SELYSETTE.

It was not the same thing. . . . Never, never. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Because you did not listen, Selysette; and look you, it is not only the ear that listens; and the things that I am saying to you now have not been truly heard save by your heart alone, and your heart has flung the words aside, and gathered only that I love you. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I love you, too. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

And therefore have you listened to me, and understood so well all that I cannot say. It is not only our hands that are joined at this moment, my poor Selysette. . . . But Meleander loves you too. Why would you not listen to him? . . .

SELYSETTE.

He is not like you, Aglavainé. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

He is better than I; and more than once must he have spoken to you far more wisely than I could speak. . . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no! it is not the same thing. . . . Listen, I cannot quite explain what I mean. When he is there I hide within myself. . . . I keep back my tears. . . . I do not want him to think I understand. . . . My love is too great. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Say on, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE.

It is so difficult. . . . You will never understand, and I know not how to tell you. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Though I fail to understand your words, I shall know what your tears are saying. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Well, there it is, Aglavaine. . . . I do not want him to love me for anything else. . . . I want him to love me because it is I. . . . Oh, it is impossible to say quite what I mean! . . . I do not want him to love me because I agree with him, or because I can answer him. . . . It is as though I were jealous of myself. Can you understand a little, Aglavaine?

AGLAVAINÉ.

When we look into a crystal vase we can soon tell whether there be pure water within, Selysette. . . . You were afraid lest he should see how beautiful you are. . . . This fear comes often to those who love, and know not why they fear. . . . We are too anxious, perhaps, that the others should divine. . . . And it is a fear that should be overcome. . . . For look you, Selysette, by dint of hiding from others the self that is in us, we may end by being unable to find it ourselves. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I know I am not wise, Aglavaine. . . . I would have him love me, even though I knew nothing, though I did nothing, though I saw nothing, though I were nothing. . . . I feel that I would have him love me though I no longer existed. . . .

And so I hid, I hid. . . . I wanted to keep everything hidden. . . It is not his fault, Aglavaine. . . . And so I was glad when he shrugged his shoulders or shook his head as he kissed me . . . much happier than when he admired me. . . . But I suppose I am wrong in wishing to be loved like this? . . .

AGLAVINE.

Who can tell how we should love, Selysette? . . . Some love one way, some another; love does this or that, and it is always well, because it is love. . . . In the very heart of us have we built love's cage, and we eye it as we would a vulture or strange eagle. . . The cage is ours, but the bird belongs to none. . . . There is nothing in the world that is further from us than our love, my poor Selysette. Needs must we wait, and try to understand. . . .

SELYSETTE.

You love him, Aglavaine?

AGLAVINE.

Whom, Selysette?

SELYSETTE.

Meleander. . . .

AGLAVINE. *

How can I help loving him?

SELYSETTE.

But do you love him as I love him?

AGLAVAINÉ.

I try to love him as I love you, Selysette.

SELYSETTE.

But if your love for him became too great? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I do not think one's love can ever be too great.

SELYSETTE.

But if he loved you more than he loves me?

AGLAVAINÉ.

He will love in you what he loved in me, for it is all one. . . There is not a creature in the world so like to me as Meleander. How could he not love you, seeing that I love you? And how could I love you if he did not? He would no longer be like himself, or like me. . . .

SELYSETTE.

There is nothing in me that he can love, and you know so much that I shall never know. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Ah, Selysette, believe me when I tell you that all my knowledge may well be worth no more than what you deem your ignorance. . . . I shall show him that you are more beautiful than he thought, that your feelings lie far deeper too. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Can you bring about that he will still love me when you are there?

AGLAVAINÉ.

Were he no longer to love you because of my being here, I would go away at once, Selysette. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I will not let you go away. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

And yet that would have to be, for I should no longer love. . . .

SELYSETTE.

It would make me very unhappy, Aglavainé. . . . Oh, I am beginning to love you, to love you! . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I have loved you a long time. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I have not; and when I first saw you I did not love you, though I loved you all the same. . . . There was a moment when I wanted . . . oh! wicked things, very wicked. . . . But I did not know that you were like this. I should have been wicked had I been you. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

No, no, Selysette. . . . In your real self you would never have been wicked, but, being

unhappy, you would not have known how to be good. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I should like to kiss you again, Aglavaine. . . . It is strange; at first I could not kiss you. . . . Oh! I was afraid of your lips . . . I know not why . . . and now. . . . Does he often kiss you?

AGLAVAINÉ.

He?

SELYSETTE.

Yes.

AGLAVAINÉ.

Yes, Selysette, and I kiss him too.

SELYSETTE.

Why?

AGLAVAINÉ.

Because there are things that only a kiss can tell. . . . Because it is perhaps only when summoned by a kiss that all that is deepest and purest issues forth from our soul. . . .

SELYSETTE.

You can kiss him when I am there, Aglavaine. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

If you wish it I will never kiss him again.

SELYSETTE.

[*Suddenly bursting into tears.*] And you can kiss him when I am not there. . . . I am glad I awakened you, Aglavaine. . . .

[*She leans on AGLAVAINÉ'S shoulder and sobs softly.*]

AGLAVAINÉ.

I am glad I awakened you, Selysette. . . . Come, let us go. . . . It is well not to linger too long in a spot where one's soul has been happier than a human soul may be. . . .

[They go out together with their arms about each other.]

SCENE III.—*A room in the castle.*

MELIGRANE and SELYSETTE are at the far end in the shadow.

MELIGRANE.

It is too much for you, my poor Selysette, say what you will. . . . You shake your head, but at this very moment you are wiping away your tears. . . .

SELYSETTE.

But, grandam, have I not told you that it is only because I am happy that my tears flow? . . .

MELIGRANE.

When people are happy they do not cry like that. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh yes, they must; otherwise, why should I be crying? . . .

MELIGRANE.

Listen to me, Selysette. . . . Just now I heard all you had to tell me about Aglavaine. I cannot

speak as she does. I am an old woman who knows but little, yet I have suffered, too, and you are all I have in the world. . . There are truths in these things, let me tell you, that may, perhaps, not be as beautiful as those whereof Aglavaine speaks ; but it is not always the most beautiful truths that are right, and the oldest and simplest that are wrong. . . One thing is very clear to me, my poor Selysette ; that, for all your smiles, your cheek is ever growing paler and paler, and no sooner do you believe you are alone than your tears begin to flow. . . .

[AGLAVAINÉ enters, unperceived, at the back of the room.

MELIGRANE.

. . . And tell me how you think all this can end. . . I have turned it over patiently, sitting here in this corner of mine, and I am doing what I can to speak calmly, though I grieve to see the suffering that has come to you, and that you have done nothing to deserve. There are only two human solutions to sorrows such as these ; either must one of you die or the other go away. . . And who should go away, if not the one whom destiny sent too late ? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Why she, rather than the one who came too soon ?

AGLAVAINÉ.

[Coming forward.] One cannot come too soon, my poor Selysette . . . one comes when the hour

has sounded, and I think our grandmother is right. . .

SELYSETTE.

If she be right there is much unhappiness before us. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

And if she be wrong, there will still be tears. . .
Adieu, Selysette. It is late ; Meleander is waiting for you. . .

SELYSETTE.

Will you not come and embrace him with me, Aglavainé ?

AGLAVAINÉ.

I shall never kiss him again, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

What has happened, Aglavainé ? Your eyes are shining. You are keeping something from me. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

My eyes are shining because I have no longer anything to keep back, Selysette. . . But a few moments ago I realised how far deeper his love lay for you than he imagined. . .

SELYSETTE.

Did he say so ? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Nay, if he had said so I should not have been so sure. . .

SELYSETTE.

And you, Aglavaine, does he not love you any more?

AGLAVAINÉ.

He loves me less than he loves you, Selysette. . .

SELYSÉTTE.

Oh! my poor Aglavaine! . . . But it is impossible. . . Why should he love you less? Tell me what to do. . . Shall I stay with you? . . . I will tell him. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

No, no . . . go to him, Selysette . . . never shall I be happier than I am to-night. . .

[They kiss each other silently and go out by different doors.]

ACT THIRD

SCENE I.—*In the Park.*

Enter MELEANDER and SELYSETTE.

SELYSETTE.

Forgive me, Meleander—you would rather be alone, I know. I am always a cause of sorrow to you; but I will only stay a moment. . . I have just come from Aglavaine's room—she is already asleep; I kissed her and she awoke not, though the stars were shining on her bed. . . I shall not keep you long; and then we will go and wake her, for she is sobbing in her sleep . . . I was afraid to wake her by myself—but there is something I want to ask you . . . so far, I do not know whether I am right or wrong—or whether it be good or bad . . . I cannot ask Aglavaine, and you will forgive me if I am mistaken.

MELEANDER.

What is it, Selysette?—Come here, and sit by me. I will play with your hair while you talk; and not seeing me, you will be able to speak out more bravely . . . I believe there is something that presses heavily on your heart. . .

SELYSETTE.

Not on my heart, Meleander . . . but on me . . . I know not where . . . on my soul, perhaps . . . it is something that weighs me down and makes me understand—what? . . . I know nothing of it yet, but I am happier than when my soul was free. . .

MELEANDER.

. . . There are times when the poor heart is almost overwhelmed, and the soul still deems itself happy. . . But enough of this; tell me first of all what it is that distresses you to-night. . .

SELYSETTE.

Aglavaine is going. . .

MELEANDER.

Who?—Aglavaine? Did she say so to you?

SELYSETTE.

Yes. . .

MELEANDER.

When? . . . And why is she going?

SELYSETTE.

She did not say . . . but she will certainly go; for now she thinks it is right, and that it should be done . . . and I am asking myself whether it would not be better that I should go instead. . .

MELEANDER.

Who?—You, Selysette?—But what can have happened? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Nothing has happened, Meleander; and I beseech you, say not a word of this to Aglavaine—you would only call forth her tears, though there be no cause for them. . . . But, you see, Meleander, I have been thinking these things over, too, while you and she have been together and I sat there by the side of our grandmother . . . and when you two came back, you were always so happy, so united, that every one was compelled to be silent, as you drew near. I have often said to myself that I am only a poor little creature who could never follow in your footsteps; but you have both been so good to me that I did not realise this as soon as I should, and you have often wanted me to go with you, because I was sad. And when I was there, each of you seemed very lighthearted, but there was not the same happiness in your souls, and I was between you like a stranger shivering with cold. And yet it was not your fault, nor was it my fault either. I know full well that I cannot understand; but I know also that this is a thing that has to be understood. . . .

MELEANDER.

My dear, dear and good Selysette . . . what is it that you think you do not understand?—Do you imagine that we understand something that you do not? . . . It is always the soul that knows how to display itself that attracts us, but the one that hides is no less beautiful; nay, it may well be

more beautiful, by dint of its very unconsciousness. . . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no; though I tried my hardest, there would always be a difference, Meleander; and whenever something I do pleases you, it is only because I have been trying to imitate Aglavaine. . .

MELEANDER.

Selysette. .

SELYSETTE.

Oh, Meleander, I did not say that to reproach you . . . did you think it was meant as a reproach? I am no longer as I used to be, and I shall never reproach any one again. Even I myself cannot tell why I have changed like this, and if any one had told me, a little time ago, that the sadness would bring happiness with it, and that I should one day press my lips on the lips of the woman you were to love—if any one had told me this, I should never have believed it; and yet it has all come to pass and I cannot help it. . . And though you tell me that you love me, thinking thus to drive away my sadness, you can never say to me the things you say to Aglavaine. . .

MELEANDER.

Perhaps I could not say the same things, Selysette. The things that we really wish to say can never be put into words, and it may be that when we wish to speak very earnestly to one we

love, we are but replying to questions that the ears cannot hear. And never do two different souls ask the same questions. And therefore, though we know it not, are our words never the same. . . But the questions that your candid soul puts to me, my poor Selysette, are as beautiful as the questions of Aglavaine's soul. . . They come from another region, that is all. So let that not sadden you, Selysette. . . Come, give me your lips. . . I kiss you on your soul to-night, Selysette. . . Come, midnight is striking. . . Let us go and see whether Aglavaine be still sobbing in her sleep. . .

[They go out with their arms about each other.]

SCENE II.—*A room in the castle.*

Enter AGLAVINE and MELEANDER.

AGLAVINE.

Do you hear that door close?

MELEANDER.

Yes.

AGLAVINE.

It is Selysette. . . She heard us coming and wished to leave us alone together. . .

MELEANDER.

She said to me that she would be going to her tower this morning; they have told her of a great strange bird. . .

AGLAVINE.

I am certain she must have been here; the whole room seems to be awaiting her return. . . Look at the little work-things she has left by the window . . . the skeins of silk, the jewels, the gold and silver threads. . .

MELEANDER.

And here is her ring with our names inscribed on it. . . And there are violets—and here is her handkerchief. . . [*He takes the handkerchief and trembles as he touches it.*] Ah! . . .

AGLAVINE.

What is it? . . .

MELEANDER.

[*Hands her the handkerchief.*] Here. . .

AGLAVINE.

Ah! . . .

MELEANDER.

It is still warm with her tears. . .

AGLAVINE.

You see, Meleander . . . as she will not speak, here are these smallest things of all that speak for her, and tell me it is time. . . [*She takes the handkerchief.*] Give it to me, Meleander. . . Poor little witness of all that is hidden from us, not to understand thee one must be dead indeed. . .

MELEANDER.

Aglavaine. . .

[He tries to kiss her.]

AGLAVAINÉ.

Do not kiss me. . . Love her well, Meleander. . .

MELEANDER.

I do not know what to believe, Aglavaine. . . There are times when I seem to love her almost as much as I love you, and times when I love her more than you, because she is further from me, or that I understand her less. . . And then, when I see you again, she disappears, I no longer am conscious of her. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I know that you love her, Meleander, and therefore I must go. . .

MELEANDER.

But it is only in you that I can love her, Aglavaine, and when you are far away, I shall love her no longer.

AGLAVAINÉ.

I know that you love her, Meleander, and so well do I know it that I have more than once envied the poor child the love that you gave her. . . Ah! do not think I am perfect! . . . If Selysette is no longer as she seemed, I too have

changed since I have lived among you. When I came I was wiser than one had need to be. I told myself that beauty could not be blamed for the tears it caused to flow, and I believed the goodness vain that had not wisdom for its guide. But now I realise that true goodness is human and foolish, and stands in no need of wisdom. . . I thought myself the most beautiful of women; I have learned that the feeblest of creatures are as beautiful as I, and they know not of their beauty. . . When I look at Selysette, I ask myself whether the timid efforts of her tender soul be not greater, and a thousand times purer, than anything I can do. There is something in my heart whispers me that she is unspeakably beautiful. She has only to stretch out her hands, and they come back laden with her heart's treasures, and she offers the priceless gems as tremblingly as might a little maid who was blind, and knew not that her two hands were full of diamonds and pearls. . .

MELEANDER.

It is strange, Aglavaine. . . . When you speak to me of her I admire you and you only, and love you more and more. . . You praise her, but the praise falls back on you, and nothing in this world can make it otherwise. My love for her can never approach my love for you, even though a God so willed it. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

When I came here, I believed that all things were possible, and that no one need suffer. . . But now I see that life refuses to conform to our plans, be they never so beautiful. . . . And I feel too that were I to linger by your side and cause others to suffer, I should no longer be what you are, nor would you be what I am, and our love would no longer be the same as our love of to-day. . .

MELEANDER.

It may be so, Aglavainé. . . But, for all that, should we not be in the right? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Ah, Meleander, it matters so little whether one be right or not! Better, I think, be wrong all one's life than bring tears to the eyes of those who are not in the right! . . . I too know all that might be said; but why say it, seeing that we know full well that it can nowise alter the deeper truth that will have none of our most beautiful words. . . . It is this we must listen to, this truth that disdains fair speeches! Notwithstanding all that we say and do, it is the simplicity of things that directs our life; and to struggle against that which is simple is only to court failure. . . . Why were we made to meet, you and I, when it was too late? Who knows? Who would dare to say that destiny and Providence are not one? . . .

MELEANDER.

[*Clasping her in his arms.*] I love you, Aglavaine; and it is the best love of all that is coming upon us. . .

AGLAVINE.

[*Putting her arms around his neck.*] I love you, Meleander, and the love that is coming upon us is the love that never dies. . .

[*A silence.*]

MELEANDER.

Have you given a thought to what our life will be in the time to come, when we shall be far away from each other, when all that will remain of this great love of ours will be the faint memory that will fade away like all memories? What shall I be doing next year? What will you be doing next year, out yonder? . . . The weary days and months will frown upon us as we stretch out arms to each other across the emptiness. . . . For all that we say that our love will remain unchanged through the years that will divide us, and the forests and trees that will stretch between, this poor life of ours is too full of moments when the tenderest recollection yields before the absence that lasts too long. . .

AGLAVINE.

I know it, Meleander. . . Here, we might be happy; there, unhappiness most assuredly awaits us. . . And none the less do we both feel that the

thing which I am doing is the thing which should be done. . . . And, were you able to pronounce a word that would keep me here, you would not say that word. . . . Needs must those who love that for which others care not, have sorrows that others cannot conceive. There is no reward, my poor Meleander, but we two look for none.

[They go out.]

SCENE III.—*At the foot of a tower.*

Enter AGLAVINE and MELEANDER.

AGLAVINE.

'Twas not a moment ago that I saw her. She was at the top of the tower, surrounded by screaming sea-gulls. For the last two or three days she has spent most of her time up there. And I know not what strange shadow it throws across my soul. She seems to be less unhappy, but at the same time more troubled in her mind, and it is as though some plan were being prepared in that profound little heart of hers. . . .

MELEANDER.

She seems to be smiling at her former life—at the Selysette of old. . . . Have you not noticed that there is always a song on her lips? . . . A mysterious light seems to shine upon her as she walks before us. . . . It would be better not to speak of your departure till she is calmer; better to wait till all

that is now transforming her has taken deeper root in her soul. . .

AGLAVAINE.

No; I shall tell her to-day. . . And as to what should be said to her, I have thought that over too, and at first I imagined it would be well to conceal the truth, so that she should suffer less. . . . Do not smile, Meleander. . . There is so little of the ordinary woman in me that you may well be surprised to find that I am like other women in this—that in the depths of my heart I, too, possess their feeble, tortuous wisdom—and that, when love commands it, falsehood comes to me as readily as to my sisters. . . So I had made up my mind to tell her that I no longer loved you, that I had deceived myself, that your love for me was dead too, and countless other little things that would have lessened me in her eyes, and thus lessen her grief, too. But in truth, when those great pure eyes of hers confronted me, I felt that it was not possible, because it was not beautiful. . . Listen. . . I hear her; she is coming down the tower-stairs, singing. . . Leave us, Meleander; I must speak to her alone, for she says things to me that she cannot yet say to you; and besides, it is only when two people are alone together that truth descends from its very fairest heaven. . .

[MELEANDER goes. A silence; then the voice of SELYSETTE is heard as it gradually comes nearer.]

AGLAVAINÉ.

When I came here, I believed that all things were possible, and that no one need suffer. . . But now I see that life refuses to conform to our plans, be they never so beautiful. . . . And I feel too that were I to linger by your side and cause others to suffer, I should no longer be what you are, nor would you be what I am, and our love would no longer be the same as our love of to-day. . .

MELEANDER.

It may be so, Aglavainé. . . But, for all that, should we not be in the right? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Ah, Meleander, it matters so little whether one be right or not! Better, I think, be wrong all one's life than bring tears to the eyes of those who are not in the right! . . . I too know all that might be said; but why say it, seeing that we know full well that it can nowise alter the deeper truth that will have none of our most beautiful words. . . . It is this we must listen to, this truth that disdains fair speeches! Notwithstanding all that we say and do, it is the simplicity of things that directs our life; and to struggle against that which is simple is only to court failure. . . . Why were we made to meet, you and I, when it was too late? Who knows? Who would dare to say that destiny and Providence are not one? . . .

MELEANDER.

[*Clasping her in his arms.*] I love you, Aglavaine; and it is the best love of all that is coming upon us. . .

AGLAVINE.

[*Putting her arms around his neck.*] I love you, Meleander, and the love that is coming upon us is the love that never dies. . .

[*A silence.*]

MELEANDER.

Have you given a thought to what our life will be in the time to come, when we shall be far away from each other, when all that will remain of this great love of ours will be the faint memory that will fade away like all memories? What shall I be doing next year? What will you be doing next year, out yonder? . . . The weary days and months will frown upon us as we stretch out arms to each other across the emptiness. . . . For all that we say that our love will remain unchanged through the years that will divide us, and the forests and trees that will stretch between, this poor life of ours is too full of moments when the tenderest recollection yields before the absence that lasts too long. . .

AGLAVINE.

I know it, Meleander. . . Here, we might be happy; there, unhappiness most assuredly awaits us. . . And none the less do we both feel that the

thing which I am doing is the thing which should be done. . . . And, were you able to pronounce a word that would keep me here, you would not say that word. . . Needs must those who love that for which others care not, have sorrows that others cannot conceive. There is no reward, my poor Meleander, but we two look for none.

[They go out.]

SCENE III.—*At the foot of a tower.*

Enter AGLAVINE and MELEANDER.

AGLAVINE.

'Twas not a moment ago that I saw her. She was at the top of the tower, surrounded by screaming sea-gulls. For the last two or three days she has spent most of her time up there. And I know not what strange shadow it throws across my soul. She seems to be less unhappy, but at the same time more troubled in her mind, and it is as though some plan were being prepared in that profound little heart of hers. . .

MELEANDER.

She seems to be smiling at her former life—at the Selysette of old. . . Have you not noticed that there is always a song on her lips? . . A mysterious light seems to shine upon her as she walks before us. . . It would be better not to speak of your departure till she is calmer; better to wait till all

that is now transforming her has taken deeper root in her soul. . .

AGLAVINE.

No; I shall tell her to-day. . . And as to what should be said to her, I have thought that over too, and at first I imagined it would be well to conceal the truth, so that she should suffer less. . . . Do not smile, Meleander. . . There is so little of the ordinary woman in me that you may well be surprised to find that I am like other women in this—that in the depths of my heart I, too, possess their feeble, tortuous wisdom—and that, when love commands it, falsehood comes to me as readily as to my sisters. . . So I had made up my mind to tell her that I no longer loved you, that I had deceived myself, that your love for me was dead too, and countless other little things that would have lessened me in her eyes, and thus lessen her grief, too. But in truth, when those great pure eyes of hers confronted me, I felt that it was not possible, because it was not beautiful. . . Listen. . . I hear her; she is coming down the tower-stairs, singing. . . Leave us, Meleander; I must speak to her alone, for she says things to me that she cannot yet say to you; and besides, it is only when two people are alone together that truth descends from its very fairest heaven. . .

[MELEANDER goes. A silence; then the voice of SELYSETTE is heard as it gradually comes nearer.]

The voice of SELYSETTE.

When forth her love went
(I heard the door close)
When forth her love went,
She smiled. . .

When back he did fare
(I heard the lamp burn)
When back he did fare
Another was there. . .

And I could see Death
(I heard her soul moan)
And I could see Death
That still watches her breath. . .

SELYSETTE comes in.

AGLAVAINÉ.

Oh, Selysette, how bright your eyes are this morning! . . .

SELYSETTE.

It is because a beautiful thought has come to me, Aglavainé. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Tell it to me; we must never keep back a beautiful thought, for all the world is the happier for it. . .

SELYSETTE.

I cannot tell it to you yet. . . Little Selysette has her secret too, and a secret it must remain!

. . . But what would you have done had you been Selysette—what would you have done if another Aglavaine, even more beautiful than you, had appeared one day and thrown her arms around Meleander?

AGLAVINE.

I think I should have tried to be happy—to feel that more light had flown into the house, and I should have tried to love her even as you love me, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

You would not have been jealous?

AGLAVINE.

I cannot tell, Selysette . . . in the depths of my heart, perhaps . . . for one moment . . . but I should have recognised that it was unworthy, and I should have tried to be happy. . .

SELYSETTE.

I am going to be happy, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVINE.

Not for one single instant shall you ever be unhappy again. . .

SELYSETTE.

I should be perfectly happy if I were only sure that this idea of mine was good. . .

AGLAVINE.

So there is something you mean, to hide from me, Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, but only till it has become very beautiful. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

When will it be very beautiful?

SELYSETTE.

When I know . . . when I know. . . Little Selysette can be beautiful too . . . you will see, you will see. . . Oh you will love me much more, both of you. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Is it possible to love you more than we do, Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE.

I would so dearly like to know what you would do, if you were I?

AGLAVAINÉ.

Tell me then, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

If I were to tell you it would no longer be the same, and you could not tell me the truth. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Do I not speak the truth? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, I know; but here you could not. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

You are strange to-day, Selysette ; take care, for it may be that you are wrong. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no ; let me kiss you, Aglavaine . . . every kiss will whisper to me that I am not wrong. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

There is a strange brightness in your eyes, my little Selysette . . . as though your soul were leaping within you. . .

SELYSETTE.

And your eyes are brighter to-day, too, though you try to hide them. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I also have something to say to you, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh what is it, Aglavaine ? . . . you look as though you were afraid, as well as I . . . Can it be the same thing ? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

What thing, Selysette ? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Nothing, nothing . . . I was merely . . . tell me what it is, quickly. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I am afraid it may distress you, Selysette, though it ought to bring happiness to you. . .

SELYSETTE.

I shall never shed another tear, Aglavainé. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

[*Seizing her arm.*] What does this mean, Selysette? you said that so strangely. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no . . . I shall not cry any more, that is all; is that not as it should be?

AGLAVAINÉ.

Let me look into your eyes. . .

SELYSETTE.

Look, look . . . tell me what you see. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

For all that we say the soul shows itself in the eyes, it seems to vanish as we gaze into them. . . And as I stand, with the fears I dare not speak of upon me, before the limpid waters of your eyes, it is they that seem to question me, and to murmur timidly: "What dost thou read?" instead of answering the question I cannot frame. . .

[*A silence.*]

SELYSETTE.

Aglavainé? . . .

AGLAVINE.

Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE.

What was it you were going to tell me? . . .

AGLAVINE.

Come to me, little Selysette! Alas! but a little more and I had taken from you all you had in the world. . .

SELYSETTE.

You are sad, Aglavaine? . . .

AGLAVINE.

Let us sit here, at the threshold of your tower, and let your lips be close to mine, as on that evening when we spoke to each other for the first time . . . do you remember that evening by the well? More than a month ago, my poor Selysette; many things have died since then, many sprung to life, and a little more light has come unto the soul. . . Not many more moments such as this will be vouchsafed to us, for to-morrow I wend my way from amongst you, and everything that we do for the last time of all seems so grave and solemn to these poor hearts of ours. . .

SELYSETTE.

You mean to go to-morrow?

AGLAVINE.

Yes, to-morrow, Selysette: it was that I wanted to tell you. At first I thought it would be best

to keep back the truth, so that the sorrow should not come upon you all at once. . . But when I thought of you, I felt at once that it could not be. . . And therefore I have come to tell you that to-morrow I shall go from here in order that you may be happy, and I tell it you in all simplicity, content that you should know how my departure saddens me, content even that you should share in the sacrifice; for we are all three making this sacrifice, and making it for something that, nameless though it be, is yet far stronger than we. . .

SELYSETTE.

Do not go to-morrow, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVINE.

Why not to-morrow, since go I must? . . .

SELYSETTE.

I ask you not to go till I have told what I have to tell. . . .

AGLAVINE.

Will you tell me soon?

SELYSETTE.

Yes, for now I am sure. . . And does Meleander know what you have just now said to me?

AGLAVINE.

Yes.

SELYSETTE.

I am no longer sad, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

What would you have done, Selysette, if I had gone away without telling you ?

SELYSETTE.

I should have followed and brought you back, Aglavainé. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

And if you had not found me ?

SELYSETTE.

I should have spent my life seeking you. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

My fear is lest you should go before I do, Selysette—I am wondering whether that can be the idea you spoke of. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, for there would be sorrow in that, and my idea now is full of gladness . . . I had thought, I too, of going away without saying a word, but now. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Now you will not go ?

SELYSETTE.

No, no, Aglavainé mine; I shall not leave the castle. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

You promise me that, from the depths of your soul ?

SELYSETTE.

From the depths of my soul, and by my eternal happiness, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

It had been better, perhaps, that I had never come. . .

SELYSETTE.

In that case I had never been happy or unhappy, for I was nothing. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Perhaps it is not well to awaken those who slumber, above all when their sleep is innocent and sweet. . .

SELYSETTE.

Surely it must be well, Aglavaine, since they never wish to slumber again. . . When I think of the time when my eyes were sealed, I would fain hide myself for shame. . . When I used to kiss Meleander I was only a little blind girl who did not know . . . but was it altogether my fault that I counted for so little ? . . . Whereas now . . . I looked at him to-night as he lay asleep . . . and then . . . I can tell you, Aglavaine ? . . .

AGLAVINE.

[*Embracing her.*] Selysette, my little Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

And then I kissed him, but he did not awake. . . And I could see the stars in the blue of the windows; and I felt as though all those stars had come to me to build a heaven in my soul. . . Oh my poor Aglavaine, you will never know—for you always knew. . . But to be able to say, "I love you," to be able to say it with one's eyes open, to the man one loves! . . . I understand now. . . I know not why I am yearning all the time to go away or to die. . . I am happy, and fain would I die, so as to be happier still. . .

AGLAVINE.

It is dangerous to think of death at moments of too much happiness. . . I will make a confession to you. . . For one second the fear rushed across me that the idea you spoke of before . . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes. . .

AGLAVINE.

That that might have been the idea. . .

SELYSETTE.

You need not be afraid, Aglavaine, such an idea as that could come only to quite a little girl. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Yes, it would be the idea of a blind little heart, to whom death might seem the one proof of love. . . . Whereas, on the contrary, those who love must live; and the more we love, the more must we wish to live. . . . But apart from that, I knew that your love for us was far above that kind of love. . . . And surely it is only some one who longs to plunge two fellow creatures into despair, who could devise anything so terribly cruel as to place an innocent death between them. . . .

SELYSETTE.

Shall I make a confession too, Aglavainé? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Tell me everything, even as I have told you everything, my little Selysette. It is sweet to feel that there is nothing between us, not even a flower wherein could hide a thought not shared by both. . . .

SELYSETTE.

I had thought of it for an instant. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Of death?

SELYSETTE.

Yes, long ago. . . . But I at once told myself all you have just told me; and then something else came to me. . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

And that is?

SELYSETTE.

Oh something quite different, and it is on the side of life. . . But the time for telling is not yet. . . . You shall see. . . I kiss you, Aglavaine. . . I feel I know not what . . . it is as though my soul—was it you who said it? . . as though my soul were leaping within me. . . And now I know at last what you would do if you were I. . .

[They go out with their arms about each other.]

ACT FOURTH

SCENE I.—*A terrace overlooking the sea.*

AGLAVAINE and SELYSETTE enter and meet each other.

AGLAVAINE.

The sun is rising over the sea, Selysette; and the waves are full of joy in their tranquillity. The fragrance and limpid silence of the dawn make one feel as though one were alone in the world, and there is something of the dawn in every word one says; is it not so? The day will be very beautiful. Shall it be the day of my departure?

SELYSETTE.

No, no; you shall not go. . .

AGLAVAINE.

I came to meet you because I saw you just now from the window of my room. I was frightened, Selysette. . . You were leaning over, nearly all your body was leaning over the crumbling old wall at the top of the tower. I imagined for a moment that the stones were giving way. I turned pale, pale—there was a chill at my heart that I had never known before. I felt my life trembling on

my lips. . . . I opened the window and screamed to warn you; but you did not understand. . . . Destiny is capricious—you do wrong to tempt it thus. What were you doing up there? This is the third time I have seen you on the tower. . . . Your hands seemed to be pulling at the stones. . . . What were you doing, Selysette? You seemed to be seeking something in space. . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, I was seeking something. . . . Have they not told you? . . . But first of all do not be frightened about me, there is no cause. . . . My old tower is stronger than they think; it will outlive us all. Why speak ill of it? It has done no one any harm, so far; and the stones are fast; I know that better than any one. . . . But have you not noticed? Here is something taking place so close to you, and you know nothing of it! . . . Five or six days ago a strange bird came to us, and it flies round and round my tower, and never seems to tire. . . . Its wings are green—a strange, pale green, inconceivably strange and pale. . . . And there is something else that is inconceivable, too; it seems to grow day by day. . . . None have been able to tell me from what country it has come. . . . I think it must have made its nest in a crevice in the wall; it was there that you saw me bending over. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Is that the key of the tower, that great golden key with which you are playing? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes; you remember I let it fall the day you arrived. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Will you give it to me? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Give it to you? . . . Why? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I would like to keep it by me till I go. . .

SELYSETTE.

But why, Aglavainé?

AGLAVAINÉ.

I scarcely know. . . Wait till I am far away before you go up there again, Selysette, and leave the bird with the green wings alone. . . Last night I dreamed, and the bird appeared in my dream. . .

SELYSETTE.

Here is the key, Aglavainé. . . I don't mind giving it to you. . . It is heavy. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Yes, it is very heavy.

SELYSETTE.

Kiss me, Aglavainé. . . Have I made you unhappy? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

You have never yet made any one unhappy. . .
Your eyes are filled with tears. . .

SELYSETTE.

I was looking at the sun, as I kissed you. . .
Kiss me again. . . I was going to Meleander, he
told me he would be up early. . . Good-bye,
Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

[*Slowly.*] Good-bye, Selysette. . .

[SELYSETTE goes. AGLAVAINÉ waits till she
is far away, then, going to the end of the
terrace, she looks for an instant at the
golden key and, with a sudden movement,
flings it far away into the sea. Then she
goes too.]

SCENE II.—*A room in the castle.*

MELIGRANE is asleep at the back. Enter SELYSETTE
holding little YSSALINE by the hand.

SELYSETTE.

Let us kiss grandam first of all; for who will kiss
her when we are gone? And surely she needs our
kisses no less than the others. . . . But say no-
thing to her. . . Aglavaine took away the key of
my tower, because she was afraid. But I have
found the other key—the one we thought was

lost. And so we can go up without any one knowing, and I will capture the green bird. . .

YSSALINE.

Will you give it to me at once ?

SELYSETTE.

I will give it to you if you say nothing. But be careful, I am going to awaken grandam. . . Do I look unhappy, Yssaline ? . . .

YSSALINE.

Is there anything I can say that would make you happy, little sister ?

SELYSETTE.

You must tell me the truth. . . Grandam must not imagine that I am unhappy. You see, often when one is very happy people make mistakes and believe one has been crying. . . You cannot see that I have been crying ?

YSSALINE.

Let me look at you carefully, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

Can you see anything ?

YSSALINE.

You must come nearer to me, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

I will take you in my arms and kiss you. . . You see nothing ? . .

YSSALINE.

One never quite knows when you are crying, little sister; you do it so softly. . .

SELYSETTE.

But I have not been crying at all. . . And remember, if they ask you to-day, when you are alone, "What did she say, what did she do, was she pale, or sad?" you must not answer all at once if you see that they are frightened, or if those about you are too pale. . . But you must tell them that I seemed to be happy, and indeed every one can see that I do nothing but smile, that I am smiling all the time; and we must always tell the truth. Now, be careful, for I am going to grandam. . . Ah! how forsaken she looks! . . . [*She imprints a long kiss upon MELIGRANE'S lips.*] Grandam. . . [*MELIGRANE does not awake.*] It is I, grandam. . . How heavily she sleeps. . . Grandam, I am come to bid you good-bye.

MELIGRANE.

[*Awaking.*] Ah! it is you, Selysette? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, grandam, Yssaline and I have come to kiss you, for we are going for a walk to-day. . .

MELIGRANE.

Whither are you going?

SELYSETTE.

I do not know yet, but we mean to go a little further than usual. . . We shall not be back before evening. Have you all you need, grandam? Aglavaine will come and take care of you in my stead. Shall I arrange the cushions before I go? I am the only one who knows how to lift you without hurting you. But Aglavaine will learn. She is so good that she will know at once if you will only let her. . . Shall I call her? . . .

MELIGRANE.

No, no; I shall sleep till you return. . .

SELYSETTE.

Good-bye, grandam, good-bye. . .

MELIGRANE.

Good-bye, Selysette; come back before the night. . .

[SELYSETTE goes quickly, holding little YSSALINE by the hand.

SCENE III.—*A corridor in the castle.*

MELEANDER meets SELYSETTE, who is holding little YSSALINE by the hand.

MELEANDER.

Where are you going so hurriedly, Selysette?

SELYSETTE.

Nowhere, Meleander. . . We are seeking shelter from the sun. . .

MELEANDER.

In very truth this is a day when the stones seem to melt in the walls, and the sea to have turned into a fiery lake. The eternal freshness of the forest is nothing but the heated breath of a funeral pile; and the sun looks like a raging lion about to swallow up the sky. . . Kiss me, Selysette, for if there linger yet any fragrance of the dawn it is surely to be found on your lips. . .

SELYSETTE.

No; I have no time; they are waiting for me—you shall kiss me this evening. . .

MELEANDER.

What is the matter, Selysette?

SELYSETTE.

Ah! It is such a little thing and over so soon! . .

MELEANDER.

What do you say?

SELYSETTE.

Nothing, nothing. . . Kiss me quickly. . .

[She kisses him violently.]

MELEANDER.

Ah! . . . my lip is bleeding. . .

SELYSETTE.

What ?

MELEANDER.

A drop of blood. . . Those beautiful little teeth of yours have wounded me, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh, I am a little . . . a little wolf. . . Have I hurt you, Meleander ? . . .

MELEANDER.

It is nothing. . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh, I am a little . . . a little wolf. . . What time is it ?

MELEANDER.

Close on noon.

SELYSETTE.

Noon ? Oh, I must hurry . . . they are waiting, waiting. . . Good-bye, my Meleander.

MELEANDER.

Selysette, Selysette, where are you going ?

SELYSETTE.

[Singing as she hastens away with little YSSALINE.]

When forth her love went

(I heard the door close)

When forth her love went

She smiled. . .

[MELEANDER stands looking after her : then goes out.]

SCÈNE IV. — *At the top of the tower.*

Enter SELYSETTE and little YSSALINE.

SELYSETTE.

Here we are, Yssaline, in the turret of the tower, and now we must know what we have to do. . . Oh the brightness there is this morning over earth and sea and sky! Why is this day so much more beautiful than other days? . . .

YSSALINE.

Where is the green bird?

SELYSETTE.

He is there, but we cannot see him yet. . . In a minute or two we will lean over the wall, but let us look around us first. One can see the castle and the courtyards, the woods and the gardens. All the flowers have opened on the banks. . . How green the grass is this morning! . . . I cannot see Aglavaine. . . Oh look, there is Meleander. . . He is waiting for her. . . Bend down, we must hide; he must not know we are here. He is close to the well; it was there that I awakened Aglavaine. . .

YSSALINE.

Look, little sister, look; come here. . . I can see the gardener planting flowers round the house. . .

SELYSETTE.

You will see them grow and you will see them open, Yssaline, and you will pluck them for me. . . Come, come, it is more than I can bear. . . Let us look from here; here there is only the sea, which is far away. . . [*They go to the other side of the tower.*] How beautiful the sea is too! . . . In not a single corner is sorrow to be found to-day. . . The sea is so green, so deep, so beautiful, that one's courage goes. . . And whatever may happen, Yssaline, it will go on smiling just the same until nightfall. . . Look at the little waves on the beach. . . I cannot, I tell you, I cannot! . . . The flowers and the sea will not let me. . . I shall never be able to do it in the daylight.

YSSALINE.

Oh, here are the gulls, little sister, the gulls are coming! Oh how many there are! . . . how many! There must be two thousand! . . .

SELYSETTE.

They have all flown here together from the far end of the sea. . . They look as though they were bringing us news. . .

YSSALINE.

No, no; it is fish they are bringing, little sister. . . And their young ones are screaming, too, from their holes in the wall. . . Their beaks are bigger than they are. . . Look, look, do you

see that great gull with the eel? . . . Don't you see? . . . There, there. . . They have eaten it already. . . And the others are over there too. . . The big ones are eating nothing. . . There again, did you see? . . . She kept nothing for herself. . . Is she the mother, little sister?

SELYSETTE.

What did I say to grandam, Yssaline?

YSSALINE.

Why are you crying, little sister?

SELYSETTE.

I am not crying, Yssaline—I am thinking, thinking. Did I kiss her before I went away? . . .

YSSALINE.

Yes, you kissed her as you said good-bye.

SELYSETTE.

How often did I kiss her?

YSSALINE.

Once, little sister, we had no time. . .

SELYSETTE.

I fear I was not gentle enough. . .

YSSALINE.

We were in a great hurry, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no; it must not be. . . She will be quite alone, Yssaline, and this will ever linger in her mind. You see, if you have not been gentler than usual when you go away, they believe that you no longer love them. . . Whereas it is the contrary they should believe; it is just when our love is too great that we are afraid to be gentle. . . Though perhaps we are wrong; for whatever they do, and were they to live a thousand years, it is only the last word we said to them that they can remember. . . I saw that myself when my mother went. . . At the last moment of all she did not smile at me, and it comes back to me again and again that she did not smile. . . And the rest of life seems scarcely to count. . . And besides, what did I say of Aglavaine? . . . I don't remember. I must see grandam again. . . The others, it is for them; they must not know. . . But she is quite alone; and it is not for her sake that I climb into the tower, not for her sake that I shall go down . . . you must see that it is impossible. . . Come, come, we will go and kiss her very tenderly. . .

[*They go out.*]

SCENE V.—*A room in the castle.*

MELIGRANE *is asleep.* SELYSETTE *and little*
YSSALINE *come in.*

SELYSETTE.

[*Waking Meligrane.*] Grandam. . .

MELIGRANE.

You are back at last, Selysette. . . I have long been waiting for you. . .

SELYSETTE.

Forgive me, grandam, I fear I was not as gentle as I should have been when I bade you good-bye. . .

MELIGRANE.

Oh but you were, Selysette, you were very gentle. What is the matter? There is something on your mind. . .

SELYSETTE.

There is nothing on my mind, grandam. It is only that I feel I must tell you how I love you. . .

MELIGRANE.

I know you do, Selysette. You have shown me your love again and again, and I never have doubted it. . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, grandam, I know . . . but I myself have never known till now. . .

MELIGRANE.

Come nearer to me, my child—you know that I can no longer embrace those I love, now that these poor arms of mine have ceased to do my bidding. . . Put your arms round me again as I cannot put mine around you. . . You seem

strange to-day, Selysette. And so it is only now that you know you love me?

SELYSETTE.

Oh no; I knew it, I knew it, but sometimes one knows a thing so long without knowing. . . And then, one day, we feel we have not been kind enough, that we might have done more, that we have not loved as we should have loved. And we want to begin again before it be too late. I have neither father nor mother, grandam, and had you not been there, I should have forgotten what a mother might mean. . . . But you never forsook little Selysette, and it was a great joy to know there was some one to go to when I was unhappy. . .

MELIGRANE.

No, no, Selysette mine, it was you who did not abandon me. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no, grandam. . . I know full well that it is you who stayed on for my sake. . .

MELIGRANE.

You are strangely serious this afternoon, Selysette, and for all that you do not seem sad. . .

SELYSETTE.

I have always been very happy, grandam, and now I know the meaning of happiness. . . .

MELIGRANE.

You do not mean that it has gone from you, Selysette?

SELYSETTE.

Far from that, I believe I have found it, grandam. . . . And tell me, have you been happy?

MELIGRANE.

When, Selysette?

SELYSETTE.

In the time that has gone, grandam. . .

MELIGRANE.

Of what time do you speak, my child?

SELYSETTE.

The time when life was. . .

MELIGRANE.

There have come to me days of sorrow even as they come to all that live on this earth, but I may truly claim to have been happy, since you have never once left me. . .

SELYSETTE.

You must not let me count for so much in your happiness, grandam. . . If you were to lose me you would still have Aglavaine. . .

MELIGRANE.

I have never lulled her to sleep on my knee, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

But still you must love her, grandam. . .

MELIGRANE.

You love her, and therefore I love her, my child. . .

SELYSETTE.

And most of all should you love her, because it was she who brought happiness to me. . . She is so beautiful, she is so beautiful that ever since my heart has known of her, I have lived by her side with my eyes full of tears. . .

MELIGRANE.

How your hands burn to-day, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

It is because my happiness is too great. . .

MELIGRANE.

I love you, Selysette mine. . .

SELYSETTE.

Have I ever been the cause of sorrow to you, grandam?

MELIGRANE.

I cannot remember, my child. . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, yes, you must needs remember . . . for we bring sorrow to all those we love. . . But tell me, I beg of you, when it was that I hurt you the most. . .

MELIGRANE.

It was only when you cried that you saddened me; and then it was not your fault. . . I remember nothing else. . .

SELYSETTE.

I shall never cry again. . .

MELIGRANE.

Ah, Selysette, happiness sways to and fro like the pendulum of a clock. But we do well to keep back our tears as long as we can. . .

SELYSETTE.

You are right, grandam; and when happiness shall have returned to you—to them and to you, grandam, get them to sit beside you one evening and tell them the story of a poor little girl. . .

MELIGRANE.

What are you saying, Selysette?

SELYSETTE.

Nothing, nothing. . . I was thinking of the days when I was a little child. . .

MELIGRANE.

So do I often think of those days, Selysette. I was not ill, then, and I was able to carry you in my arms or run after you. . . And thus, thanks to you, I have been a mother a second time, long after my

beauty had left me; and some day you will know that women never weary of motherhood, that they would cherish death itself, did it fall asleep on their knee. . . But little by little all passes away, Selysette, and the very smallest soon cease to be small. . .

SELYSETTE.

I know it, grandam, and sorrow passes away, too, passes away and disappears. . . But beauty remains and others are happy. . .

MELIGRANE.

Who told you that, my child?

SELYSETTE.

I learned it from Aglavaine. . .

MELIGRANE.

How your eyes sparkle to-day, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Stifling a sob.*] It is because I love all the world, grandam. . .

MELIGRANE.

I believe you are crying, my child? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Oh no, I am not crying; and if one or two tears are falling, they are only tears of joy. . .

MELIGRANE.

Put your arms around me, Selysette—closer, closer, and stay with me. . .

YSSALINE.

Little sister, I want to be kissed too. . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Gently moving YSSALINE away.*] No, no, Yssaline, she shall have all my kisses to-day. . . The day will soon come when it will be your turn to have all the kisses. . . . Farewell, grandam, farewell. . .

MELIGRANE.

Selysette! . . . what is the matter? . . . where are you going? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Farewell, grandam, farewell. . .

MELIGRANE.

Selysette, stay here. . . I won't have it. . . You shall not go. . . [*She struggles in vain to rise and stretch out her arms.*] I cannot, I cannot. . . You see that I cannot, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

I, too, cannot, grandam . . . farewell . . . sleep in peace to-night and—do not dream . . . farewell, farewell. . .

[*She goes out quickly holding little YSSALINE by the hand.*]

beauty had left me; and some day you will know that women never weary of motherhood, that they would cherish death itself, did it fall asleep on their knee. . . But little by little all passes away, Selysette, and the very smallest soon cease to be small. . .

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I believe you are crying, my child? . . .

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Oh no, I am not crying; and if one or two tears are falling, they are only tears of joy. . .

MELIGRANE.

Put your arms around me, Selysette—closer, closer, and stay with me. . .

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[*Gently moving YSSALINE away.*] No, no, Yssaline, she shall have all my kisses to-day. . . The day will soon come when it will be your turn to have all the kisses. . . . Farewell, grandam, farewell. . .

MELIGRANE.

Selysette! . . . what is the matter? . . . where are you going? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Farewell, grandam, farewell. . .

MELIGRANE.

Selysette, stay here. . . I won't have it. . . You shall not go. . . [*She struggles in vain to rise and stretch out her arms.*] I cannot, I cannot. . . You see that I cannot, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

I, too, cannot, grandam . . . farewell . . . sleep in peace to-night and—do not dream . . . farewell, farewell. . .

[*She goes out quickly holding little YSSALINE by the hand.*]

MELIGRANE.

Selysette! . . . Selysette! . . .

[She is heard sobbing softly to herself as the light grows fainter and fainter.]

SCENE VI.—*A Corridor in the Castle.*

[Enter SELYSETTE holding little YSSALINE by the hand. She sees AGLAVINE coming to meet her, and hides with little YSSALINE behind one of the pillars which support the roof.]

AGLAVINE.

[Drawing near.] Is it you, Selysette? Why are you hiding?

SELYSETTE.

I scarcely know, Aglavaine. . . I thought you would like to be alone. . .

AGLAVINE.

Where were you going to, Selysette? . . And here is little Yssaline looking at me from the corners of her eyes. . . Is there a plot between you?

SELYSETTE.

I have made a promise that I must keep. . .

AGLAVINE.

Whither were you dragging Selysette, Yssaline?
[YSSALINE does not answer.] Won't you tell me?

SELYSETTE.

Oh, she knows how to keep a secret quite as well as though she were grown up. . .

AGLAVINE.

It may be the evening light, but you look very pale, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

I want to kiss you, Aglavaine. . .

[They exchange a long kiss.]

AGLAVINE.

Oh, your lips are soft and sweet to-night, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

Yours too, Aglavaine. . . I am very happy. . . . There is strength on your lips. . .

AGLAVINE.

A light shines from you as from a lamp. . .

SELYSETTE.

You have not seen grandam?

AGLAVINE.

No. Shall I go to her?

SELYSETTE.

No, no; there is no need; she is asleep. . . You were looking for Meleander?

AGLAVAINÉ.

Yes. And you, Selysette ?

SELYSETTE.

When you see him, kiss him for me. . . I am glad to think that it is you who will kiss him when I am not there. . . I love you so much, so much ! . . . But see how impatient Yssaline is, and how she is pulling my hand. . . Good-bye, Aglavaine mine ; you will see me soon. . .

[She goes with little YSSALINE, and sings as she moves along.]

When back he did fare
(I heard the lamp burn)

When back he did fare
Another was there . . .

And I could see. . . Ah ! Ah ! . . .

[The song ceases suddenly and AGLAVAINÉ goes out.]

SCENE VII.—*At the top of the Tower.*

Enter SELYSETTE and little YSSALINE.

SELYSETTE.

And now the hour has come, my little Yssaline. I shall not go down to them again ; I shall not smile gently at them any more. . . How cold it is in the tower ; the wind comes from the north. See the light that it throws on the waves. . . The

flowers are hidden from sight, the voice of mankind is still, and sadness hangs over all. . . How different from this morning. . .

YSSALINE.

And where is the bird, little sister ?

SELYSETTE.

We must wait till the sun has sunk into the very depths of the sea, till the light lies dead on the horizon, for the bird is afraid of the light, and has never yet looked at the sun. . .

YSSALINE.

And if there should be any stars, little sister ?

SELYSETTE.

And if there should be any stars ? . . . [*Looking at the sky.*] There are no stars yet, but they are all waiting, eager to peer through the sky ; and we must hasten, for it will be more terrible still when they are there. . .

YSSALINE.

I am very cold, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

Let us sit here ; the wall will keep the wind from us, and we will wait till the last gleam of crimson shall have died away in the sea. . . How slowly the sun is sinking. . . When it is gone I will look for the bird. . . Let me wrap my white scarf about you ; I shall want it no more. . .

YSSALINE.

Why are you holding me so close to you, little sister? . .

SELYSETTE.

Because my happiness is too much for me, Yssaline; never have I been happier than I am to-day. . . But look well at me. . . I am smiling, I am sure I am smiling. . . Why do you not smile at me? . . .

YSSALINE.

You are speaking so quickly, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

Am I speaking quickly? . . . I have no time to lose. . .

YSSALINE.

And besides, you are tearing up all my flowers. . .

SELYSETTE.

What flowers? Oh, these! . . . I was forgetting that they were yours. . .

YSSALINE.

I will not have you cry, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

But I am not crying, my little Yssaline. . . That is the very last thing of all that any one must believe. . . . I am smiling so much that I seem to be crying. . .

YSSALINE.

Then why do your eyes seem to be crying? . . .

SELYSETTE.

How can I tell what my eyes choose to do? . . . But remember this well: if you tell any one that I seemed to be sad, you will be punished for a long, long time. . .

YSSALINE.

Why?

SELYSETTE.

You will know some day. And you must not ask me so many questions; you are only a little girl who cannot yet understand the things that are clear to others. I did not understand either when I was your age, no, not until very long after. . . I may do this or that; but it is not the things you see that matter the most. . . Look you, my little Yssaline, I must not speak of it, though I should so much like to tell some one, for it is sad to be the only one who knows. . .

YSSALINE.

I can hardly see the sun now, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

Wait, wait yet a little, Yssaline; for as the sun goes down, so does something else come nearer and the nearer it comes to me the more clearly do I see. . . I can no longer tell whether I have acted wisely in bringing you to the tower; but some one had to come with me, for they will want to know

all that took place, and they will be happy if only they do not know. . . You do not understand a word of what I am saying to you now, little sister mine. . . Yes, but a day will come when you will understand it all, when you will see all that you cannot see now that your eyes are beholding it. . . And then you will be sorrowful, nor will you ever be able to forget what you are about to see. . . But when you are a woman you will shed many tears because of this, and it may even weigh upon your life. . . And therefore I ask you to-day to forgive me, though you know not why, for the suffering that will come upon you some time when you know too well. . .

YSSALINE.

The flocks are coming back, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

They will come back to-morrow too, Yssaline.

YSSALINE.

Yes, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

And the birds will sing to-morrow. . .

YSSALINE.

Yes, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

And the flowers will open to-morrow. . .

YSSALINE.

Yes, yes, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

Why had it to be the younger of the two? . . .

YSSALINE.

There is only a little red line there now, little sister. . .

SELYSETTE.

You are right; it is time. . . You yourself are urging me to it; and the stars too are growing impatient. . . Farewell, Yssaline. I am very, very happy. . .

YSSALINE.

So am I, little sister. Be quick, the stars are coming. . .

SELYSETTE.

Have no fear, Yssaline; they will see me no more. . . Come, sit in this corner, and let me fasten my scarf around you, for the wind is very cold. . . Do you really love me? No, no; do not answer; I know, I know . . . I am going to roll up this big stone, so that you cannot go near the opening over which I mean to bend. . . Do not be frightened if you should not see me any more. It will only mean that I have had to go down the other side. . . . Do not wait for me; go down the stone staircase by yourself. . . And, above all, do not try to see what I have done, do not go near this wall. . . You would see nothing and you would be punished. . . . I shall wait for you below. . . Kiss me, Yssaline, and tell grandam. . .

YSSALINE.

What shall I tell her, little sister? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Nothing, nothing. . . . I thought I had forgotten something. . . [*She goes to the crumbling wall that faces the sea and leans over.*] Oh, how deep and cold the sea looks! . . .

YSSALINE.

Little sister?

SELYSETTE.

There it is; I see it. . . Do not move. . .

YSSALINE.

Where is it? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Wait . . . wait . . . I must bend over a little more. . . . Yssaline! . . . Yssaline! . . . The stones are trembling! . . . I am falling! . . . Oh!

[*A side of the wall gives. The sound of a fall is heard, and a low cry of pain. Then a long silence.*]

YSSALINE.

[*Rising, in tears.*] Little sister! . . . little sister! . . . Where are you? . . . I am frightened, little sister! . . .

[*She bursts out sobbing, alone in the turret.*]

ACT FIFTH

SCENE I.—*A Corridor in the Castle.*

Enter AGLAVINE *and* MELEANDER.

MELEANDER.

She has fallen asleep; but the doctors are going, and, pray as I might, I have not been able to draw a single word of hope from them. . . She fell on to a hillock of sand, that the wind had swept to the foot of the tower, as though to receive her more tenderly. It is there that the servants found her, whilst you were hoping to meet her on the road to the village. There is no wound to be seen on her poor little body; but a stream of blood flows from her lips; and when she opened her eyes she smiled at me, but said not a word. . .

AGLAVINE.

But Yssaline? What does Yssaline say? They tell me she was with her. . .

MELEANDER.

I have questioned her. . . She was found at the top of the tower, trembling with cold and fright. . . . She repeats, over and over again, through

her tears, that the wall opened while Selysette was leaning over so as to lay hold of a bird that was passing. . . . When I met her this afternoon, here in the corridor—and it was on this very spot, between the pillars—she seemed less sad than usual. . . . “She seemed less sad than usual!” . . . Do we not both stand condemned by those words? . . . And now, when I think of all she has said to us, of all she has done, monstrous suspicions burst upon my soul, and crush my life. . . . Love is as cruel as hate. . . . I no longer believe, I no longer believe. . . . And all my sorrow turns into loathing! . . . Curses on the beauty that brings disaster with it! . . . Curses on the mind that craves for too much beauty! . . . Curses on the destiny that is blind and deaf! . . . And I curse the words that deceive and betray, and I curse the life that will not give ear to life! . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Meleander. . .

MELEANDER.

What do you want of me? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Come with me. . . . I must see her, for it is not possible. . . . We must know. . . . She cannot have done it deliberately. She cannot, for in that case. . .

MELEANDER.

In that case?

AGLAVAINÉ.

We must know. . . Come. . . No matter how. . . . Her suffering must have been too great before she would have done that! . . . And I would never again be able, never, never. . .

[She drags him away quickly.]

SCENE II.—*Selysette's Bedroom.*

SELYSETTE *lies upon her bed.* Enter AGLAVAINÉ and MELEANDER.

SELYSETTE.

[With a slight movement.] Is it you, Aglavaine? Is it you, Meleander?—I was wanting you both so much. I am happy now you have come. . .

MELEANDER.

[Bursting into tears as he throws himself upon the bed.] Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE.

What is the matter? . . . You are both crying. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Selysette! Selysette! . . . What have you done? . . . Oh wretch that I am! . . .

SELYSETTE.

What is the matter, Aglavaine? . . . Why are you so distressed? . . . Have I done anything to make you unhappy? . . .

her tears, that the wall opened while Selysette was leaning over so as to lay hold of a bird that was passing. . . . When I met her this afternoon, here in the corridor—and it was on this very spot, between the pillars—she seemed less sad than usual. . . . “She seemed less sad than usual!” . . . Do we not both stand condemned by those words? . . . And now, when I think of all she has said to us, of all she has done, monstrous suspicions burst upon my soul, and crush my life. . . . Love is as cruel as hate. . . . I no longer believe, I no longer believe. . . . And all my sorrow turns into loathing! . . . Curses on the beauty that brings disaster with it! . . . Curses on the mind that craves for too much beauty! . . . Curses on the destiny that is blind and deaf! . . . And I curse the words that deceive and betray, and I curse the life that will not give ear to life! . . .

AGLAVINE.

Meleander. . .

MELEANDER.

What do you want of me? . . .

AGLAVINE.

Come with me. . . . I must see her, for it is not possible. . . . We must know. . . . She cannot have done it deliberately. She cannot, for in that case. . .

MELEANDER.

In that case?

AGLAVAINÉ.

We must know. . . Come. . . No matter how. . . Her suffering must have been too great before she would have done that! . . . And I would never again be able, never, never. . .

[She drags him away quickly.]

SCENE II.—*Selysette's Bedroom.*

SELYSETTE *lies upon her bed.* Enter AGLAVAINÉ and MELEANDER.

SELYSETTE.

[With a slight movement.] Is it you, Aglavaine? Is it you, Meleander?—I was wanting you both so much. I am happy now you have come. . .

MELEANDER.

[Bursting into tears as he throws himself upon the bed.] Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE.

What is the matter? . . . You are both crying. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Selysette! Selysette! . . . What have you done? . . . Oh wretch that I am! . . .

SELYSETTE.

What is the matter, Aglavaine? . . . Why are you so distressed? . . . Have I done anything to make you unhappy? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

No, no, my poor Selysette, you do not bring unhappiness. . . It is I who bring death . . . it is I who have failed to do all that I should have done. . .

SELYSETTE.

I do not understand, Aglavainé. . . What has happened—tell me. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I ought to have known, Selysette, and I thought I did know, when I spoke to you the other day. . . For many days past something has been unceasingly crying aloud in my heart, and I found nothing, and knew nothing, of what should be done—though it needed but the simplest word that the simplest creature on earth might have spoken to save a life that only craved to live. . .

SELYSETTE.

What did you know? tell me. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

When you spoke of that idea of yours, the other day, Selysette . . . and this morning, and again this afternoon, I should have held you close to me, so close that it should have fallen between us like a pressed-out grape. . . I should have plunged my two hands into your soul, and dragged forth the death that I felt was living there. . . I should have achieved something by dint of love . . . and

I knew of nothing I could do, and I looked on and was blind to it all, though I saw everything, everything! . . . The wretchedest girl of this wretched village would have found a kiss that should save life for us! . . . I have been either unutterably base or unutterably blind! . . . The first time, perhaps that I have fled from the truth like a child! . . . And I dare not look into myself. . . Forgive me, Selysette; I shall never be happy again.

SELYSETTE.

Listen to me, Aglavaine. I am very glad that you have come to me at once, for I feel that ere long my mind will wander from me. . . There is something here which presses on my eyelids. . . But whatever I may say, later on—I cannot tell what I may say—you know the strange fancies that flit across the dying. . . I was at a death-bed once, and it is my turn now. . . Well, whatever I may say later on, pay no heed. . . But at present I know what I am saying; and do you listen to that only, and recall that only, and that alone. . . Surely there lingers not a doubt within you, Aglavaine? . . .

AGLAVINE.

Of what should I be in doubt, my poor Selysette?

SELYSETTE.

Do you imagine that . . . ?

AGLAVINE.

Yes. . .

SELYSETTE.

That it was not by accident I fell?

AGLAVAINÉ.

I know it was not, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

We are told that falsehood is impossible to those who are dying, Aglavainé, and I mean to tell you the truth. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I knew that, from the love you bore us, you would be strong enough for that. . .

SELYSETTE.

It was an accident, and I fell, Aglavainé.—Is it you who are sobbing, Meleander?

AGLAVAINÉ.

Listen now to me, Selysette. . . You know that the truth is known to us. . . And if at this moment I question you, it is not from doubt of mine, but it is so that you, you, should doubt no more. . . You are very beautiful, Selysette, and I am on my knees before you. . . The thing that you have done, so simply, is the most beautiful thing whereof love is capable when love is blind. . . But now I ask you to do something more beautiful still, and I ask it in the name of a wiser love. . . Locked between your lips, there lies the perfect peace of all our life. . .

SELYSETTE.

Of what peace do you speak, Aglavaine?

AGLAVAINÉ.

Of one that is deep and very sad. . .

SELYSETTE.

But how can I give it to you, Aglavaine? There is nothing in me. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

You need but tell us that you wished to die, thinking thus to make us happy. . .

SELYSETTE.

Gladly would I say this to you, Aglavaine, but it is impossible, seeing that it is untrue. . . You do not believe that one could tell an untruth on one's death-bed? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

I beseech you, think not of death, Selysette. . . . See, I kiss you, and pour all my life into your veins, and flood your soul with the spirit of life! . . . If death were near I could understand the telling of this falsehood. . . But death is far away, and all life is clamouring for the truth. . . Admit it, Selysette; and do not shake your head; speaking to each other as we are now speaking, can we possibly misunderstand? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ AND SELYSETTE

SELYSETTE.

And none the less you are wrong, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Must we weep far apart then, with thousands of miles between us? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Why will you not believe it to be true?

AGLAVAINÉ.

Not even a child would believe it—for there is not a word of yours, not an act, but proves the contrary. . .

SELYSETTE.

Which words and acts do you speak of? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Why did you bid farewell to our grandmother?

SELYSETTE.

I never left the house without first bidding her good-bye. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Why. . . But why everything, Selysette? . . .
Oh, the misery of questions such as these, when death is close by, and we know that the truth is there, to our hand, nestling beneath her heart! . . .

SELYSETTE.

Your doubts sadden me, Aglavaine, and I was feeling so happy. . . What can I do so that you shall doubt no more? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Give us the truth, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

But what is the truth you desire? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

It was I who, all unwittingly, urged you to this. . .

SELYSETTE.

No, no, Aglavaine, urged was I by none. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

It needs but one word to dispel the clouds from life, and on my knees do I beseech you to say this one poor word. . . Whisper it to me if you will, let your eyes make a sign to me, and even Meleander shall never know. . .

MELEANDER.

Aglavaine is right, Selysette. . . I ask it, too. . .

SELYSETTE.

I was leaning over, and I fell. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

You asked me so often what I would do in your place. . .

SELYSETTE.

I was leaning over, and I fell. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Do you not know why I question you thus? . . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, yes, Aglavainé mine, I can see that it would have been more beautiful, but it would not be the truth. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

[*Sobbing.*] Oh, God! how poor we are before all those of simple love!

SELYSETTE.

Aglavainé! . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Selysette! . . . What has happened? . . . You are turning pale. . . . Is the pain worse? . . .

SELYSETTE.

No. . . It is the joy that makes me suffer. . . Oh! how you are weeping, Meleander! . . .

MELEANDER.

Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE.

Do not weep like this, my poor Meleander. . . Now indeed do we love each other. . . There is no need for tears. . . Soon I shall be dead, and there will be so glad a smile on my lips that you will scarce believe I can be dead, so happy shall I seem. . . What? You crying too, Aglavaine? Is it not happiness, then? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Give us the perfect peace, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

I will give you the peace you gave me, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

You could give it, but you will not. . .

SELYSETTE.

And yet is there such great peace within me, Aglavaine. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

[*Sobbing.*] God Himself were wrong before you, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

[*With a change in her voice.*] But why are you going, said my grandam to me, why go away, my child? Because of a key I have found, grandam, because of a key I have found. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Coming to herself.*] Yssaline! . . . What was I saying? . . . Tell me what I said . . . it is not true . . . I warned you. . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

You said nothing, nothing. . . . Do not torment yourself, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

I warned you. . . I may perhaps be saying things soon, but they will not be true. . . You will forgive me, for my soul is growing so weak. . . Did I speak of grandam? . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

Yes. . .

SELYSETTE.

Yes, I wanted to tell you. . . You must raise her without touching her arms. . . . I would have taught you, but time, time would not allow. Oh! Aglavaine, be careful! . . .

AGLAVAINÉ.

[*Alarmed.*] What is it, what is it, Selysette? . .

SELYSETTE.

Nothing, nothing; it is going. . . I thought I was about to say things that were not true. . .

AGLAVAINED.

I will not seek for the truth any more, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

Put your hand over my mouth when I say things that are untrue. . . Promise, promise, I beseech you. . .

AGLAVAINED.

I promise, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE [*to MELEANDER*].

I have something to say to her, Meleander. . . [*MELEANDER goes away silently.*] He is sad, he is sad. . . . You will tell him some day, by-and-by, when he has forgotten . . . put your hand on my lips, Aglavaine, a sudden pain has come to me. . .

AGLAVAINED.

Tell me, tell me, Selysette. . .

SELYSETTE.

I have forgotten what I had to say. . . It was not truth, but falsehood, that was coming. . . Put your hand over my eyes, too. . . . It is well that they should be closed by you who opened them. . . It is true; it is true.

AGLAVAINED.

Selysette! . . .

SELYSETTE.

[*Very faintly.*] I was . . . I was leaning over,
and I fell. . .

[*She dies.*]

AGLAVAINÉ.

[*With a sob.*] Meleander. . .

MELEANDER.

[*Falls, sobbing, on to SELYSETTE's body.*] Sely-
sette! . . .

THE END

There is a friend that as the wise man saith
 Cleaves closer than a brother : nor to me
 Hath time not shown, through days like waves at strife,
 This truth more sure than all things else but death,
 This pearl most perfect found in all the sea
 That washes toward your feet those waifs of life.

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE (1837-1909)

FIRST CHORUS FROM "ATALANTA"

WHEN the hounds of spring are on winter's traces,
 The mother of months in meadow or plain
 Fills the shadows and windy places
 With lisp of leaves and ripple of rain ;
 And the brown bright nightingale amorous
 Is half assuaged for Itylus,
 For the Thracian ships and the foreign faces,
 The tongueless vigil, and all the pain.

Come with bows bent and with emptying of quivers,
 Maiden most perfect, lady of light,
 With a noise of winds and many rivers,
 With a clamour of waters, and with might ;
 Bind on thy sandals, O thou most fleet,
 Over the splendour and speed of thy feet ;
 For the faint east quickens, the wan west shivers,
 Round the feet of the day and the feet of the night.

Where shall we find her, how shall we sing to her,
 Fold our hands round her knees, and cling ?
 O that man's heart were as fire and could spring to her
 Fire, or the strength of the streams that spring !
 For the stars and the winds are unto her
 As raiment, as songs of the harp-player ;
 For the risen stars and the fallen cling to her,
 And the southwest-wind and the west-wind sing.

THE LADY OF SHALOTT

Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley,
Hear a song that echoes cheerly,
From the river winding clearly,
 Down to tower'd Camelot :
And by the moon the reaper weary,
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers " 'Tis the fairy
 Lady of Shalott."

PART II

There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay.
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse is on her if she stay
 To look down to Camelot.
She knows not what the curse may be,
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she,
 The Lady of Shalott.

And moving through a mirror clear
That hangs before her all the year,
Shadows of the world appear.
There she sees the highway near
 Winding down to Camelot :
There the river eddy whirls,
And there the surly village-churls,
And the red cloaks of market girls,
 Pass onward from Shalott.

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
An abbot on an ambling pad,
Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad,
Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad,
 Goes by to tower'd Camelot ;

And sometimes thro' the mirror blue
The knights come riding two and two :
She hath no loyal knight and true,
The Lady of Shalott.

But in her web she still delights
To weave the mirror's magic sights,
For often thro' the silent nights,
A funeral, with plumes and lights,
And music, went to Camelot :
Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed ;
"I am half sick of shadows," said
The Lady of Shalott.

PART III

A bow-shot from her bower eaves,
He rode between the barley-sheaves,
The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves,
And flamed upon the brazen greaves
Of bold Sir Lancelot.
A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd
To a lady in his shield,
That sparkled in the yellow field,
Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,
Like to some branch of stars we see
Hung in the golden Galaxy.
The bridle bells rang merrily
As he rode down to Camelot :
And from his blazon'd baldric slung
A mighty silver bugle hung,
And as he rode his armour rung,
Beside remote Shalott.

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And music, went to Camelot :
Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed ;
"I am half sick of shadows," said
The Lady of Shalott.

For winter's rains and ruins are over,
And all the season of snows and sins ;
The days dividing lover and lover,
The light that loses, the night that wins ;
And time remember'd is grief forgotten,
And frosts are slain and flowers begotten,
And in green underwood and cover
Blossom by blossom the spring begins.

The full streams feed on flower of rushes,
Ripe grasses trammel a travelling foot,
The faint fresh flame of the young year flushes
From leaf to flower and flower to fruit ;
And fruit and leaf are as gold and fire,
And the oat is heard above the lyre,
And the hoofed heel of a satyr crushes
The chestnut-husk at the chestnut-root.

And Pan by noon and Bacchus by night,
Fleeter of foot than the fleet-foot kid,
Follows with dancing and fills with delight
The Mænad and the Bassarid ;
And soft as lips that laugh and hide
The laughing leaves of the trees divide,
And screen from seeing and leave in sight
The god pursuing, the maiden hid.

The ivy falls with the Bacchanal's hair
Over her eyebrows hiding her eyes ;
The wild vine slipping down leaves bare
Her bright breast shortening into sighs ;
The wild vine slips with the weight of its leaves,
But the berried ivy catches and cleaves
To the limbs that glitter, the feet that scare
The wolf that follows, the fawn that flies.

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick-jewell'd along the saddle-leather,
The helmet and the helmet-feather
Burn'd like one burning flame together,

As he rode down to Camelot,
As often thro' the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
Move'd over still Shalott.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd ;
On burnish'd hovers his war-horse trode ;
From underneath his helmet flow'd
His coal-black curls as on he rode,

As he rode down to Camelot.
From the bank and from the river
He flash'd into the crystal mirror,
"Tirra lirra," by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces thro' the room,
She saw the water-lily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,

She look'd down to Camelot.
Out flew the web and floated wide ;
The mirror crack'd from side to side ;
"The curse is come upon me !" cried
The Lady of Shalott.

PART IV

In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining
Over tower'd Camelot ;

Down she came and found a boat
Beneath a willow left afloat,
And round about the prow she wrote
The Lady of Shalott.

And down the river's dim expanse—
Like some bold seer in a trance,
Seeing all his own mischance—
With a glassy countenance
Did she look to Camelot.
And at the closing of the day
She loosed the chain, and down she lay;
The broad stream bore her far away,
The Lady of Shalott.

Lying, robed in snowy white
That loosely flew to left and right—
The leaves upon her falling light—
Thro' the noises of the night
She floated down to Camelot:
And as the boat-head wound along
The willowy hills and fields among,
They heard her singing her last song,
The Lady of Shalott.

Heard a carol, mournful, holy,
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darken'd wholly,
Turn'd to tower'd Camelot;
For ere she reach'd upon the tide
The first house by the water-side,
Singing in her song she died,
The Lady of Shalott.

THE POPPY

Under tower and balcony,
 By garden-wall and gallery,
 A gleaming shape she floated by,
 Dead-pale between the houses high,
 Silent into Camelot.
 Out upon the wharfs they came,
 Knight and burgher, lord and dame,
 And round the prow they read her name,
 The Lady of Shalott.

Who is this? and what is here?
 And in the lighted palace near
 Died the sound of royal cheer;
 And they crossed themselves for fear,
 All the knights at Camelot:
 But Lancelot mused a little space;
 He said, "She has a lovely face;
 God in his mercy lend her grace,
 The Lady of Shalott."

LORD TENNYSON (1809-1892)

THE POPPY

SUMMER set lip to earth's bosom bare,
 And left the flush'd print in a poppy there;
 Like a yawn of fire from the grass it came,
 And the fauning wind puff'd it to flapping flame.

With burnt mouth red like a lion's it drank
 The blood of the sun as he slaughter'd sank,
 And dipp'd its cup in the purpurate shine
 When the eastern conduits ran with wine.

Till it grew lethargied with fierce bliss,
And hot as a swinkèd gipsy is,
And drowsed in sleepy savageries,
With mouth wide a-pout for a sultry kiss.

A child and man paced side by side,
Treading the skirts of eventide ;
But between the clasp of his hand and hers
Lay, felt not, twenty wither'd years.

She turn'd, with the rout of her dusk South hair,
And saw the sleeping gipsy there ;
And snatch'd and snapp'd it in swift child's whim,
With—"Keep it, long as you live!"—to him.

And his smiles, as nymphs from their laving meres,
Trembled up from a bath of tears ;
And joy, like a mew sea-rock'd apart,
Toss'd on the wave of his troubled heart.

For he saw what she did not see,
That—as kindled by its own fervency—
The verge shrivell'd inward smoulderingly :

And suddenly 'twixt his hand and hers
He knew the twenty wither'd years—
No flower, but twenty shrivell'd years.

"Was never such thing until this hour,"
Low to his heart he said ; "the flower
Of sleep brings wakening to me,
And of oblivion memory."

"Was never this thing to me," he said,
"Though with bruised poppies my feet are red !"
And again to his own heart very low :
"O child ! I love, for I love and know ;

"But you, who love nor know at all
The diverse chambers in Love's guest-hall,
Where some rise early, few sit long :
In how differing accents hear the throng
His great Pentecostal tongue :

"Who know not love from amity,
Nor my reported self from me ;
A fair fit gift is this, meseems,
You give—this withering flower of dreams.

"O frankly fickle, and fickle true,
Do you know what the days will do to you ?
To your Love and you what the days will do,
O frankly fickle, and fickle true ?

"You had loved me, Fair, three lives—or days :
'Twill pass with the passing of my face.
But where I go, your face goes too,
To watch lest I play false to you.

"I am but, my sweet, your foster-lover,
Knowing well when certain years are over
You vanish from me to another ;
Yet I know, and love, like the foster-mother.

"So, frankly fickle, and fickle true !
For my brief life-while I take from you
This token, fair and fit, meseems,
For me—this withering flower of dreams."

.
The sleep-flower sways in the wheat its head,
Heavy with dreams, as that with bread :
The goodly grain and the sun-flush'd sleeper
The reaper reaps, and Time the reaper.

I hang 'mid men my needless head,
 And my fruit is dreams, as theirs is bread :
 The goodly men and the sun-hazed sleeper
 Time shall reap, but after the reaper
 The world shall glean of me, me the sleeper !

Love ! love ! your flower of wither'd dream
 In leavèd rhyme lies safe, I deem,
 Shelter'd and shut in a nook of rhyme,
 From the reaper man, and his reaper Time.

Love ! I fall into the claws of Time :
 But lasts within a leavèd rhyme
 All that the world of me esteems—
 My wither'd dreams, my wither'd dreams.

FRANCIS THOMPSON (1860-1907)

LETTY'S GLOBE

WHEN Letty had scarce pass'd her third glad year,
 And her young artless words began to flow,
 One day we gave the child a colour'd sphere
 Of the wide earth, that she might mark and know,
 By tint and outline, all its sea and land.
 She patted all the world ; old empires peep'd
 Between her baby fingers ; her soft hand
 Was welcome at all frontiers. How she leap'd,
 And laugh'd and prattled in her world-wide bliss ;
 But when we turned her sweet unlearnèd eye
 On our own isle, she raised a joyous cry—
 " Oh ! yes, I see it, Letty's home is there !"
 And while she hid all England with a kiss,
 Bright over Europe fell her golden hair.

CHARLES TENNYSON TURNER (1808-1879)

GO, LOVELY ROSE

Go, lovely Rose—
Tell her, that wastes her time and me,
That now she knows,
When I resemble her to thee,
How sweet and fair she seems to be.

Tell her, that's young
And shuns to have her graces spied,
That, hadst thou sprung
In deserts where no men abide,
Thou must have uncommended died.

Small is the worth
Of beauty from the light retired :
Bid her come forth,
Suffer herself to be desired,
And not blush so to be admired.

Then die—that she
The common fate of all things rare
May read in thee :
How small a part of time they share
That are so wondrous sweet and fair.

EDMUND WALLER (1606-1687)

TO NIGHT

MYSTERIOUS Night! when our first parent knew
Thee from report divine, and heard thy name,
Did he not tremble for this lovely frame,
This glorious canopy of light and blue?

Yet 'neath a curtain of translucent dew,
Bathed in the rays of the great setting flame,
Hesperus with the host of heaven came,
And lo ! Creation widened in man's view.

Who could have thought such darkness lay concealed
Within thy beams, O Sun ! or who could find,
Whilst flow'r and leaf and insect stood revealed,
That to such countless orbs thou mad'st us blind !
Why do we then shun Death with anxious strife ?
If Light can thus deceive, wherefore not Life ?

JOSEPH BLANCO WHITE (1775-1841)

INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY FROM RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

THERE was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparell'd in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore ;—
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

The rainbow comes and goes,
And lovely is the rose ;
The moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare ;
Waters on a starry night
Are beautiful and fair ;
The sunshine is a glorious birth ;
But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath pass'd away a glory from the earth.

Now, while the birds thus sing a joyous song,
And while the young lambs bound

As to the tabor's sound,
To me alone there came a thought of grief :
A timely utterance gave that thought relief,
And I again am strong :

The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep ;
No more shall grief of mine the season wrong ;
I hear the echoes through the mountains throng,
The winds come to me from the fields of sleep,
And all the earth is gay ;

Land and sea
Give themselves up to jollity,
And with the heart of May
Doth every beast keep holiday ;—
Thou child of Joy,

Shout round me, let me hear thy shouts, thou happy Shepherd-boy !

Ye blessèd Creatures, I have heard the call
Ye to each other make ; I see
The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee ;
My heart is at your festival,
My head hath its coronal,

The fulness of your bliss, I feel—I feel it all.

O evil day ! if I were sullen
While Earth herself is adorning,

This sweet May-morning,
And the children are culling

On every side,

In a thousand valleys far and wide,
Fresh flowers ; while the sun shines warm,

And the babe leaps up on his mother's arm :—

I hear, I hear, with joy I hear !

—But there's a tree, of many, one,

A single field which I have look'd upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone :

The pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat :
Whither is fled the visionary gleam ?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream ?
Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting :
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar :
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home :
Heaven lies about us in our infancy !
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy ;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended ;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.
Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own ;
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
And, even with something of a mother's mind,
And no unworthy aim,
The homely nurse doth all she can
To make her foster-child, her inmate, Man,
Forget the glories he hath known,
And that imperial palace whence he came.
Behold the Child among his new-born blisses,
A six years' darling of a pigmy size !
See, where 'mid tink of his own land he lies,
Dotted by kisses of his mother's kisses,
Was shut open him from his father's eyes !

See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,
 Some fragment from his dream of human life,
 Shaped by himself with newly-learned art ;
 A wedding or a festival,
 A mourning or a funeral ;
 And this hath now his heart,
 And unto this he frames his song :
 Then will he fit his tongue
 To dialogues of business, love, or strife ;
 But it will not be long
 Ere this be thrown aside,
 And with new joy and pride
 The little actor cons another part ;
 Filling from time to time his "humorous stage"
 With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,
 That Life brings with her in her equipage ;
 As if his whole vocation
 Were endless imitation.

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
 Thy soul's immensity ;
 Thou best philosopher, who yet dost keep
 Thy heritage, thou eye among the blind,
 That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
 Haunted for ever by the eternal Mind,—
 Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!
 On whom those truths do rest,
 Which we are toiling all our lives to find,
 In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave ;
 Thou, over whom thy Immortality
 Broods like the Day, a master o'er a slave,
 A Presence which is not to be put by ;
 To whom the grave
 Is but a lonely bed without the sense or sight
 Of day or the warm light,
 A place of thought where we in waiting lie ;

Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might
Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height,
Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The years to bring the inevitable yoke,
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?
Full soon thy soul shall have her earthly freight,
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That Nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive!

The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction: not indeed
For that which is most worthy to be blest—
Delight and liberty, the simple creed
Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest,
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast:—
Not for these I raise

Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
 Nor Man nor Boy,
 Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
 Can utterly abolish or destroy !

 Hence, in a season of calm weather
 Though inland far we be,
 Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
 Which brought us hither,
 Can in a moment travel thither,
 And see the children sport upon the shore,
 And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

Then sing, ye birds, sing, sing a joyous song !
 And let the young lambs bound
 As to the tabor's sound !

We, in thought, will join your throng,
 Ye that pipe and ye that play,
 Ye that through your hearts to-day
 Feel the gladness of the May !

What though the radiance which was once so bright
 Be now for ever taken from my sight,

 Though nothing can bring back the hour
 Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower ;

 We will grieve not, rather find
 Strength in what remains behind ;

 In the primal sympathy

 Which, having been, must ever be ;

 In the soothing thoughts that spring
 Out of human suffering ;

 In the faith that looks through death,

In years that bring the philosophic mind.

And O ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
 Forebode not any severing of our loves !

Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might ;
 I only have relinquish'd one delight

To live beneath your more habitual sway.
 I love the brooks which down their channels fret,
 Even more than when I tripp'd lightly as they ;
 The innocent brightness of a new-born Day
 Is lovely yet ;

The clouds that gather round the setting sun
 Do take a sober colouring from an eye
 That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality ;
 Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
 Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
 Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
 To me the meanest flower that blows can give
 Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

W. WORDSWORTH (1770-1850)

ON THE EXTINCTION OF THE VENETIAN REPUBLIC

ONCE did she hold the gorgeous East in fee ;
 And was the safeguard of the West : the worth
 Of Venice did not fall below her birth,
 Venice the eldest Child of Liberty.
 She was a maiden city, bright and free ;
 No guile seduced, no force could violate ;
 And when she took unto herself a mate,
 She must espouse the everlasting Sea.
 And what if she had seen those glories fade,
 Those titles vanish, and that strength decay ;
 Yet shall some tribute of regret be paid
 When her long life hath reach'd its final day :
 Men are we, and must grieve when even the shade
 Of that which once was great is pass'd away.

W. WORDSWORTH

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

THE subject of poetry has been the theme of a vast array of books from Aristotle's *Poetics* and Horace's *Art of Poetry* to the *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* by Mr. A. C. Bradley. But a student will find almost all that he needs of stimulus to thought in the masterly article on "Poetry" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Two articles on "The Sonnet," one in *Chambers's Encyclopædia*, and the other in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, by the writer of the article on "Poetry," adequately discuss that poetic form. It will be most profitable for a student who has mastered these three articles to spend the rest of his time at the feet of the Muses, studying the principles incarnate in the forms of poetry.

Anthologies tend to take colour from their compilers; but of course they have the qualities of their defects. The best modern anthology of English verse is *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, by A. T. Quiller-Couch. Cheaper anthologies are the *Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language*, selected and arranged with notes by F. T. Palgrave—first and second series. The "second series," while it includes some good verse, must not be taken too seriously as a judicious compilation.

Sonnets of this Century, with a critical introduction on the Sonnet by William Sharp, gives a good survey of the history of the Sonnet in England from Milton down to the present day (1886).

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